A "TEMPORARY GENTLEMAN" in France

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A "Temporary Gentleman" in France

Home Letters from an Officer at the Front

With Introductory Chapters by

Captain A. J. Dawson
Border Regiment (British Forces)

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PUBLISHERS' NOTE

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BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION

THE writer has introduced this "Temporary Gentleman" to many good fellows in England, France, and Flanders, and is very anxious to introduce him on a really friendly footing to all his brothers-in-arms across the Atlantic; from New York to San Francisco, and from Quebec to Vancouver Island, also. But how best to do it? It really is no very easy matter, this, to present one simple, very human unit of the New Armies, to a hundred millions of people.

"Dear America: Herewith please find one slightly damaged but wholly decent 'Temporary Gentleman' who you will find repays consideration."

I think that is strictly true, and though, in a way, it covers the ground, it does not, somehow, seem wholly adequate; and I have an uncomfortable feeling that the critics might find in it ground for severe comments. But it is just what I mean; and I would be well content that all the kindly

men and women of America should just find out about this "Temporary Gentleman" for themselves, and form their own opinion, rather than that I should set down things about him in advance. If these letters of his do not commend him to America's heart and judgment, I am very sure no words of mine would stand any chance of doing so. Yes, for my part, warmly anxious as I am for America to know him, and to feel towards him as folk do in France and Flanders and Britain, I am perfectly prepared to let him stand or fall upon his own letters, which certainly discover the man to you, whatever you may think of him.

Withal, in case it may interest any among the millions of American families from which some member has gone out to train and to fight, to save the Allied democracies of the world from being over-ridden by the murderous aggression of its remaining autocracies, I take pleasure in testifying here to the fact that among the officers now serving in Britain's New Armies (as among those who, whilst serving, have passed to their long rest) are very many thousands who are just for all the world like the writer of these letters. I have watched and spoken with whole cadet-

training battalions of them, seen them march past in column of fours, chins well up, arms aswing, eyes front, and hearts beating high with glad determination and pride—just because their chance has nearly come for doing precisely what the writer of these letters did: for treading the exact track he blazed, away back there in 1915; for the right to offer the same sort of effort he made, for God and King and Country; to guard the Right, and avenge the Wrong, and to shield Christendom and its liberties from a menace more deadly than any that the world's admitted barbarians and heathens ever offered.

I know there are very many thousands of them who are just like this particular "Temporary Gentleman,"—even as there must be many thousands of his like in America,—because there have been so many among those with whom I have lived and worked and fought, in the trenches. And it does seem to me, after study of the letters, that this statement forms something of a tribute to the spirit, the efficiency, and the devotion to their duty, of the whole tribe of the Temporary Officers.

Their lost sense of humour (withered out of existence, I take it, by the poison gas of Prussian

Kultur) would seem to have made the German nation literally incapable of forming an approximately correct estimate of the capacities of any people outside the confines of their own machine-made, despotically ordered State, in which public sentiment and opinion is manufactured from "sealed pattern" recipes kept under lock and key in Potsdam and the Wilhelmstrasse. Their blunders in psychology since July, 1914, would have formed an unparalleled comedy of errors, if they had not, instead, produced a tragedy unequalled in history. With regard to America alone, the record of their mistakes and misreadings would fill a stout volume. In the earlier days of the War, I read many German statements which purported (very solemnly) to prove:

(*a*) That in the beginning of the War they killed off all the British officers.

(*b*) That the British officer material had long since been exhausted.

(*c*) That, since it was impossible for the British to produce more officers, they could not by any effort place a really big Army in the field.

And the queer thing is that German machine-made illusions are of cast-iron. They "stay put"; permanently. During 1917 I read again

precisely the same fatuous German statement regarding America and her inability to produce an army, that one read in 1914 and 1915 about Britain. The British New Armies (which Germany affirmed could never seriously count) have succeeded in capturing nearly three times as many prisoners as they have lost, and more than four times as many guns. From 1916 onward they steadily hammered back the greatest concentrations of German military might that Hindenburg could put up, and did not lose in the whole period as much ground as they have won in a single day from the Kaiser's legions. Yet still, in 1917, the same ostrich-like German scribes, who vowed that Britain could not put an army in the field because they could never officer it, were repeating precisely the same foolish talk about America and her New Armies.

Perhaps there is only one argument which Germany is now really able to appreciate. That argument has been pointedly, and very effectively, presented for some time past by the writer of these letters, and all his comrades. From this stage onward, it will further be pressed home upon the German by the armies of America, whose potentialities he has laboriously professed to ridicule.

It is the argument of high explosive and cold steel; the only argument capable of bringing ultimate conviction to the Wilhelmstrasse that the English-speaking peoples, though they may know nothing of the goose-step, yet are not wont to cry "Kamerad," or to offer surrender to any other people on earth.

I know very well that the writer of these letters had no thought as he wrote—back there in 1916—of any kind of argument or reply to Potsdamed fantasies. But yet I would submit that, all unwittingly, he has furnished in these letters (on America's behalf, as well as Britain's) what should prove for unprejudiced readers outside Germany a singularly telling answer to the Boche's foolish boasts of the Anglo-Saxon inability to produce officers. As a correspondent in the Press recently wrote: "Why, for generations past the English-speaking peoples have been officering the world and all its waters—especially its waters!" And so they have, as all the world outside Germany knows, from the Yukon to Tierra del Fuego; from the Atlantic round through the Philippines to the golden gate and back.

It is a high sense of honour, horse sense, and sportsmanship, in our Anglo-Saxon sense, that lie

at the root of successful leadership. And one of Prussia's craziest illusions was that with us, these qualities were the sole monopoly of the men who kept polo ponies and automobiles!

Only the guns of the Allies and the steel of their dauntless infantrymen can enlighten a people so hopelessly deluded as the Germans of to-day. But for the rest of the world I believe there is much in this little collection of the frank, unstudied writings of an average New Army officer, who, prior to the War, was a clerk in a suburban office, to show that sportsmanship and leadership are qualities characteristic of every single division of the Anglo-Saxon social systems; and that, perhaps more readily than any other race, we can produce from every class and every country in the English-speaking half of the world, men who make the finest possible kind of active service officers; men who, though their commissions may be "Temporary" and their names innocent of a "von," or any other prefix, are not only fine officers, but, permanently, and by nature, gentlemen and sportsmen.

Withal, it may be that I should be falling short of complete fulfilment of a duty which I am glad and proud to discharge, if I omitted to furnish

any further information regarding the personality of the writer of these letters. And so, if the reader will excuse yet another page or two of wire entanglement between himself and the actual trenches—the letters, I mean—I will try to explain.

A. J. Dawson,
Captain.

London, 1918.

THE GENESIS OF THE "TEMPORARY GENTLEMAN"

In the case of the Service Battalion officer of Britain's New Army who, with humorous modesty, signs himself "Your 'Temporary Gentleman,'" what is there behind that enigmatic signature that his letters do not tell us? The first of these homely epistles shows their writer arriving with his Battalion in France; and the visit is evidently his first to that fair land, since he writes: "I wonder if I should ever have seen it had there been no war!" That exclamation tells a good deal.

But of the man and his antecedents prior to that moment of landing with his unit in France, the letters tell us nothing; and if it be true that the war has meant being "born again" for very many Englishmen, that frequently quoted statement at all events points to the enjoyment of some definite status before the war.

Inquiry in this particular case speedily brings

home to one the fact that one is investigating the antecedents of a well-recognised New Army type, a thoroughly representative type, as well as those of an individual. In his antecedents, as in the revolutionary development which the war has brought to him, this "Temporary Gentleman" is clearly one among very many thousands who have, so to say, passed through the same crucibles, been submitted to the same standard tests, and emerged in the trenches of France and Flanders, in Gallipoli and in Mesopotamia, in Africa, and in other places in which the common enemy has endeavoured to uphold his proposed substitution of *Kultur* for civilisation, as we understand it.

In the year 1896 there died, in a south-western suburb of London, a builder and contractor in a small, suburban way of business. An industrious, striving, kindly, and honourable man, he had had a number of different irons in the fire, as the saying goes, and some of them, it may be, would have provided a good reward for his industry if he had lived. As the event proved, however, the winding-up of his affairs produced for his widow a sum representing no more than maintenance upon a very modest scale of a period of perhaps three years. The widow was not alone in the world.

She had a little daughter, aged five, and a sturdy son, aged eight years. Nineteen years later that boy, into whose youth and early training not even the mention of anything military ever crept, was writing letters home from fire trenches in France, and signing them "Your 'Temporary Gentleman.'"

For seven years after his father's death the boy attended a day school in Brixton. The tuition he there received was probably inferior in many ways to that which would have fallen to his lot in one of the big establishments presided over by the County Council. But his mother's severely straitened circumstances had rather strengthened than lowered her natural pride; and she preferred to enlarge the sphere of her necessary sacrifices, and by the practice of the extremest thrift and industry to provide for the teaching of her two children at private schools. The life of the fatherless little family was necessarily a narrow one; its horizon was severely restricted, but its respectability was unimpeachable; and within the close-set walls of the little Brixton home there never was seen any trace of baseness, of coarseness, or of what is called vulgarity. The boy grew up in an atmosphere of reticence and modesty, in which the

dominant factors were thrift, duty, conscientiousness, and deep-rooted family affection.

The first epoch of his fatherless life closed when our "Temporary Gentleman" left school, at the age of fifteen, and mounted a stool in the office of a local auctioneer and estate agent, who, in the previous decade, had had satisfactory business dealings with the youth's father. This notable event introduced some change into the quiet little mother-ruled *ménage;* for, in a sense, it had to be recognised that, with the bringing home of his first week's pay, the boy threatened to become a man. The patient mother was at once proud and a little disconcerted. But, upon the whole, pride ruled. The boy's mannishness, brought up as he had been, did not take on any very disconcerting shapes, though the first cigarette he produced in the house, not very long after the conclusion of the South African War, did prove something of a disturbing element just at first.

The South African War affected this little household, perhaps, as much as it would have been affected by a disastrous famine in China. It came before the period at which the son of the house started bringing home an evening newspaper, and while the only periodicals to enter the home

were still *The Boy's Own Paper* and a weekly journal concerned with dressmaking and patterns. As a topic of conversation it was not mentioned half a dozen times in that household from first to last.

The next really great event in the life of the auctioneer's clerk was his purchase of a bicycle, which, whilst catastrophic in its effect upon his Post Office Savings Bank account, was in other respects a source of great happiness to him. And if it meant something of a wrench to his mother, as a thing calculated to remove her boy a little farther beyond the narrow confines of the sphere of her exclusive domination, she never allowed a hint of this to appear. Her son's admirable physique had long been a source of considerable pride to her; and she had wisely encouraged his assiduity in the Polytechnic gymnasium of which he was a valued supporter.

For the youth himself, his bicycle gave him the key of a new world, whilst robbing the cricket and football clubs to which he belonged of a distinctly useful member. He became an amateur of rural topography, learned in all the highways and by-ways of the southern Home Counties. His radius may not have exceeded fifty miles, but yet his

bicycle interpreted England to him in a new light, as something infinitely greater and more beautiful than Brixton.

Quietly, evenly, the years slid by. The boy became a youth and the youth a man; and, in a modest way, the man prospered, becoming the most important person, next to its proprietor, in the estate agent's business. The mother's life became easier, and the sister (who had become a school-teacher) owed many little comforts and pleasures to the consistent kindliness of one who now was admittedly the head of the little household and its chief provider. He never gave a thought to the State or felt the smallest kind of interest in politics; yet his life was in no way self-centred or selfish, but, on the contrary, one in which the chief motive was the service of those nearest and dearest to him. Whilst rarely looking inward, his outward vision was bounded by the horizon of his well-ordered little home, of the Home Counties he had learned to love, and of the south-coast seaside village in which the family spent a happy fortnight every summer.

They were in that little seaside village when the Huns decreed war and desolation for Europe in August, 1914, and the three were a good deal upset

about the whole business, for it interfered with the railway service, and broke in very unpleasantly upon the holiday atmosphere, which, coming as it did for but one fortnight in each year, was exceedingly precious to the little family. However, with the Englishman's instinct for clinging to the established order, with all the national hatred of disturbance, they clung as far as possible to the measured pleasantness of their holiday routine, and, after a week, returned to the workaday round of life in Brixton.

Then began a time of peculiar stress and anxiety for the little household, the dominating factor in which was the growing strangeness, as it seemed to them, of its actual head and ruler; of the man in the house. At first he talked a great deal of the war, the overpowering news of the day, and he passed many scathing criticisms upon the conduct of the authorities in their handling of the first stages of the monstrous work of preparation. He had much to say of their blunders and oversights; and somewhat, too, of what he called their criminal unpreparedness. He stopped talking rather abruptly at breakfast one morning; and one of the headlines which subsequently caught the eyes of his sister, in the newspaper her brother had

propped against the coffee-pot, put this inquiry, in bold black type:

"WHOSE FAULT IS IT, MR. CITIZEN, THAT THE COUNTRY IS UTTERLY UNPREPARED FOR WAR?"

Those nightmarish early days of the great war slowly succeeded one another, and the mother and daughter grew perturbed over the change they saw creeping over their man. He talked hardly at all now. All the old cheery, kindly good humour which had provided half the sunshine of their lives seemed to be disappearing and giving place to a queer, nervous, morose sort of depression. It was as if their man lived a double life. Clearly he was much affected, even absorbed, by some mental process which he never so much as mentioned to them. Morning and evening they saw him, and yet it was as though he was not there, as though he lived and had his being in some other world, aloof from the old cosy, familiar, shared world in which they had always been together. The housewifely eye of his mother noted with something like alarm that his bedroom candlestick required a fresh candle every day. One had been wont to serve him for a fortnight. Always, she thought

he would unburden himself when he kissed her good-night. But he said never a word; and the nerve strain in the little household, which had been so quietly happy and bright, became almost unendurable.

Then the end came, with the beginning of the third week in September. The evening was extraordinarily peaceful and fine. The sister and a girl friend were at the little cottage piano. The visitor had a rather rich contralto voice, and sang with considerable feeling. In the middle of her third song the master of the house rose abruptly and walked out of the room, closing the door sharply behind him. The song was one of those called a "recruiting song." Late that night, when the visitor had departed, the brother apologised to his mother and sister for leaving them so abruptly, and spoke of a sudden headache. And the next evening he brought home the devastating news that he had enlisted, and would be leaving them next day for a military depot.

The news was received in dead silence. In some mysterious way neither of the women had contemplated this as possible. For others, yes. For their man—the thing was too wildly, remotely strange to be possible. There was his business;

and, besides— It was merely impossible. And now he was an enlisted soldier, he told them. But, though they hardly suspected it, not being given to the practice of introspection, their man was not the only member of the little household in whom a fundamental and revolutionary change had been wrought by the world-shaking news of the past six weeks. In the end the women kissed their man, and the central fact of his astounding intelligence was not discussed at all. They proceeded direct to practical, material arrangements. But when the time came for her good-night kiss, the mother said, very quietly, "God bless you, dear!"; and the sister smiled and showed a new pride through the wet gleam of her eyes.

And then the auctioneer's clerk disappeared from the peaceful purlieus of Brixton and went out alone into an entirely new world, the like of which had never presented itself to his fancy, even in dreams. He became one of fifteen men whose home was a bell tent designed to give easy shelter to perhaps half that number. He began to spend his days in a routine of drill which, even to him with his gymnasium training, seemed most singularly tiresome and meaningless—at first.

At the end of four weeks he returned home for a

Saturday night and Sunday in the Brixton house; and he wore one stripe on the sleeve of his service jacket. To his intelligence there now was nothing in the whole intricate round of section, platoon, and company drill which was meaningless, however wearing it might sometimes seem. There was a tan on his cheeks, a clear brightness in his eyes, an alert swing in his carriage, and a surprisingly crisp ring in his voice which at once bewildered and delighted his womenfolk. He seemed not so much a new man as the man whom they had always loved and respected, in some subtle way magnified, developed, tuned up, brought to concert pitch.

In November he was advised by his Company Commander to apply for a Commission. The officer badly wanted him for a Sergeant, but this officer had long since learned to place duty first and inclination a long way behind; and it was apparent to him that in this tall, alert Lance-Corporal of his, as in so many hundreds of other men in the ranks, there was the making of a good officer.

Shortly before Christmas, 1914, he was gazetted a Second Lieutenant, and on New Year's Day he found himself walking across a parade ground to

take his place in front of the platoon he subsequently led in France, after long months of arduous training in several different English camps.

Three-quarters of a year passed between the day of this "Temporary Gentleman's" enlistment and his writing of the first of the letters now published over his pseudonym; and it may well be that all the previous years of his life put together produced no greater modification and development in the man than came to him in those nine months of training for the New Army. The training had its bookish side, for he was very thorough; but it was in the open air from dawn till dark, and ninety per cent. of it came to him in the process of training others.

The keynotes of the training were *noblesse oblige*, sportsmanship and responsibility, that form of "playing the game" which is at the root of the discipline of the British Army. While he taught the men of his platoon they taught him, in every hour of the day and many hours of the night. They learned to call him "A pretty good sort," which is very high praise indeed. And he learned to be as jealous of his men as any mother can be of her children. He learned to know them, in fair weather and in foul, for the splendid fellows they

are; and in the intensely proud depths of his own inner consciousness to regard them as the finest platoon in the New Army.

And then came the longed-for day of the departure for France, for the land he was to learn to love, despite all the horrors of its long fighting line, just as he learned most affectionately to admire the men and reverence the women of brave, beautiful France. In the letters that he wrote from France he had, of course, no faintest thought of the ultimate test of publication. That is one reason why his name is not now attached to documents so intimate, even apart from the sufficiently obvious military reasons.

A. J. D.

CONTENTS

	Page
The First Letter	1
The First March	9
The Tale of a Tub	18
The Trenches at Last	28
A Dissertation on Mud	37
Taking over on a Quiet Night	46
"What It's Like"	56
The Dug-out	67
A Bombing Show	79
Over the Parapet	89
The Night Patrol	99
In Billets	111
Bombardment	121
The Day's Work	132
Tommy Dodd and Trench Routine	142
Stalking Snipers	152
An Artful Stunt	160

PAGE

THE SPIRIT OF THE MEN 169

AN UNHEALTHY BIT OF LINE . . . 179

THEY SAY—— 188

THE NEW FRONT LINE 197

A GREAT NIGHT'S WORK 210

THE COMING PUSH 220

FRONT LINE TO HOSPITAL 229

THE PUSH AND AFTER 239

BLIGHTY 250

A "Temporary Gentleman" in France

A "Temporary Gentleman" in France

THE FIRST LETTER

HERE we are at last, "Somewhere in France," and I suppose this will be the first letter you have ever had from your "Temporary Gentleman" which hasn't a stamp on it. It is rather nice to be able to post without stamps, and I hope the Censor will find nothing to object to in what I write. It's hard to know where to begin.

Here we are "at last," I say—we were nearly a year training at home, you know—and I shall not easily forget our coming. It really was a wonderful journey from Salisbury Plain, with never a hitch of any sort or kind, or so much as a buttonstick gone astray. Someone with a pretty good head-piece must arrange these things. At ten minutes to three this morning we were on the

parade ground at —— over a thousand strong. At twenty minutes to eleven we marched down the wharf here at ——, well, somewhere in France; and soon after twelve the cook-house bugle went in this camp, high up on a hill outside the town, and we had our first meal in France—less than eight hours from our huts on the Plain; not quite the Front yet, but La Belle France, all the same. I wonder if I should ever have seen it had there been no war?

Our transport, horses, mules, and limbers had gone on ahead by another route. But, you know, the carrying of over a thousand men is no small matter, when you accomplish it silently, without delay, and with all the compact precision of a battalion parade, as this move of ours was managed. Three minutes after our train drew up at the harbour station, over there in England, the four companies, led by Headquarters Staff, and the band (with out regimental hound pacing in front) were marching down the wharf in column of route, with a good swing. There were four gangways, and we filed on board the steamer as if it had been the barrack square. Then off packs and into lifebelts every man; and in ten minutes the Battalion was eating its haversack breakfast ration,

and the steamer was nosing out to the open sea, heading for France, the Front, and Glory.

The trip across was a stirring experience in its way too. The wide sea, after all, is just as open to the Boche as to us, and he is pretty well off for killing craft and mines. Yet, although through these long months we have been carrying troops to and fro every day, not once has he been able to check us in the Channel. The way the Navy's done its job is—it's just a miracle of British discipline and efficiency. All across the yellow foam-flecked sea our path was marked out for us like a racecourse, and outside the track we could see the busy little mine-sweepers hustling to and fro at their police work, guarding the highway for the British Army. Not far from us, grim and low, like a greyhound extended, a destroyer slid along: our escort.

The thing thrilled you, like a scene in a play; the quiet Masters of the Sea guarding us on our way to fight the blustering, boastful, would-be stealers of the earth. And from first to last I never heard a single order shouted. There was not a single hint of flurry.

It is about seven hours now since we landed, and I feel as though we had been weeks away

already—I suppose because there is so much to see. And yet it doesn't seem very foreign, really; and if only I could remember some of the French we were supposed to learn at school, so as to be able to understand what the people in the street are talking about, it would be just like a fresh bit of England. Although, just a few hours away, with no sea between us, there's the Hun, with his poison gas and his Black Marias and all the rest of the German outfit. Well, we've brought a good chunk of England here since the war began; solid acres of bully beef and barbed wire, condensed milk and galvanised iron, Maconochie rations, small-arm ammunition, biscuits, hand grenades, jam, picks and shovels, cheese, rifles, butter, boots, and pretty well everything else you can think of; all neatly stacked in miles of sheds, and ready for the different units on our Front.

I think the French are glad to see us. They have a kind of a welcoming way with them, in the streets and everywhere, that makes you feel as though, if you're not actually at home, you are on a visit to your nearest relations. A jolly, cheery, kindly good-natured lot they are, in spite of all the fighting in their own country and all

the savage destruction the Huns have brought. The people in the town are quite keen on our drums and bugles; marching past them is like a review. It makes you "throw a chest" no matter what your pack weighs; and we are all carrying truck enough to stock a canteen with. The kiddies run along and catch you by the hand. The girls—there are some wonderfully pretty girls here, who have a kind of a way with them, a sort of style that is French, I suppose; it's pretty taking, anyhow—they wave their handkerchiefs and smile. "Bon chance!" they tell you. And you feel they really mean "Good luck!" I like these people, and they seem to like us pretty well. As for men, you don't see many of them about. They are in the fighting line, except the quite old ones. And the way the women carry on their work is something fine. All with such a jolly swing and a laugh; something brave and taking and fine about them all.

If this writing seems a bit ragged you must excuse it. The point of my indelible pencil seems to wear down uncommonly fast; I suppose because of the rough biscuit box that is my table. We are in a tent, with a rather muddy boarded floor, and though the wind blows mighty cold

and keen outside, we are warm as toast in here. I fancy we shall be here till to-morrow night. Probably do a route march round the town and show ourselves off to-morrow. The C. O. rather fancies himself in the matter of our band and the Battalion's form in marching. We're not bad, you know; and "A" Company, of course, is pretty nearly the last word. "Won't be much sleep for the Kaiser after 'A' Company gets to the Front," says "the Peacemaker." We call our noble company commander "the Peacemaker," or sometimes "Ramsay Angell," as I think I must have told you before, because he's so deadly keen on knuckle-duster daggers and things of that sort. "Three inches over the right kidney, and when you hear his quiet cough you can pass on to the next Boche," says "the Peacemaker," when he is showing off a new trench dagger. Sort of, "And the next article, please," manner he has, you know; and we all like him for it. It's his spirit that's made "A" Company what it is. I don't mean that we call him "the Peacemaker" to his face, you know.

We can't be altogether war-worn veterans or old campaigners yet, I suppose, though it does seem much more than seven hours since we landed.

But everyone agrees there's something about us that we did not have last year—I mean yesterday. From the Colonel down to the last man in from the depot we've all got it; and though I don't know what it is, it makes a lot of difference. I think it is partly that there isn't any more "Out there" with us now. It's "Out here." And everything that came before to-day is "Over in England," you know; ever so far away. I don't know why a man should feel more free here than in England. But there it is. The real thing, the thing we've all been longing for, the thing we joined for, seems very close at hand now, and, naturally, you know, everyone wants to do his bit. It's funny to hear our fellows talking, as though the Huns were round the corner. If there's anything a man doesn't like—a sore heel, or a split canteen of stew, or a button torn off—"We'll smarten the Boche for that," they say, or, "Righto! That's another one in for the Kaiser!"

You would have thought we should have had time during the past six months or so to have put together most of the little things a campaigner wants, wouldn't you? especially seeing that a man has to carry all his belongings about with him and yet I would make a sporting bet that

there are not half a dozen men in the Battalion who have bought nothing to carry with them to-day. There is a Y. M. C. A. hut and a good canteen in this camp, and there has been a great business done in electric torches, tooth-powder, chocolate, knives, pipe-lighters, and all manner of notions. We are all very glad to be here, very glad; and nine out of ten will dream to-night of trenches in France and the Push we all mean to win V.C.'s in. But that's not to say we shall forget England and the—the little things we care about at home. Now I'm going to turn in for my first sleep in France. So give what you have to spare of my love to all whom it may concern, and accept the rest yourself from your

"*Temporary Gentleman.*"

THE FIRST MARCH

We reached this long, straggling village in pale starlight a little after six this morning; and with it the welcome end of the first stage of our journey from the port of disembarking to our section of the French Front.

In all the months of our training in England I never remember to have seen "A" Company anything like so tired; and we had some pretty gruelling times, too, during those four-day divisional stunts and in the chalk trenches on the Plain; and again in the night ops. on the heather of those North Yorkshire moors. But "A" Company was never so tired as when we found our billets here this morning. Yet we were in better form than any other company in the Battalion; and I'm quite sure no other Battalion in the Brigade could march against our fellows.

The whole thing is a question of what one has to carry. Just now, of course, we are carrying every blessed thing we possess, including great-

coats and blankets, not to mention stocks of 'baccy, torches, maps, stationery, biscuits, and goodness knows what besides; far fuller kits, no doubt, than tried campaigners ever have. (I found little M——, of No. 3 Platoon, surreptitiously stuffing through a hedge a case of patent medicines, including cough-mixture and Mother Somebody's Syrup!) If you ever visit France you probably won't travel on your own ten toes; but if you should, be advised by me and cut your kit down to the barest minimum; and when you've done that, throw away a good half of what's left.

Boots and socks. Some people will tell you that stocks and shares and international politics are matters of importance. I used to think the pattern of my neckties made a difference to our auctions. I know now that the really big things, the things that are really important, are socks and boots, and hot coffee and sleep, and bread—"Pang—Compree?" says Tommy to the French women, with a finger at his mouth—and then socks and boots again. You thought we paid a good deal in the shop for those swanky trench boots, W—— and myself. That was nothing to what we've paid since for wearing 'em. Excellent trench boots, I dare say; but one has to walk

across a good bit of France before getting to the trenches, you know. Those boots are much too heavy to carry and no good for marching. They look jolly and workmanlike, you know, but they eat up too much of one's heels. Tell all the officers you know to come out in ordinary marching boots, good ones, but ordinary ankle boots. Plenty time to get trench boots when they get to the trenches. Good old Q.M. Dept. will see to that. Our respected O.C. Company had no horse, you know (we haven't yet made connection with our transport), and his heels to-day look like something in the steak line about half-grilled.

We left camp at the port I mustn't name about eight o'clock last night, and marched down the hill to the station in sort of thoughtful good spirits, the packs settling down into their grooves. To save adding its immensity to my pack, I wore my imposing trench coat, with its sheep-skin lining; waist measurement over all, say a hundred and twenty-five. Two of us had some difficulty about ramming "the Peacemaker," through his carriage door into the train, he also being splendid in a multi-lined trench coat. Then we mostly mopped up perspiration and went to sleep.

Between twelve and one o'clock in the morning

we left the train (not without emotion; it was a friendly, comfortable train), and started to march across France. The authorities, in their godlike way, omitted to give us any information as to how far we were to march. But the weather was fine, and "A" Company moved off with a good swing, to the tune of their beloved "Keep the Camp Fires Burning." The biggest of packs seems a trifle, you know, immediately after four hours' rest in a train. But after the first hour it's astonishing how its importance in your scheme of things grows upon you; and at the end of the third or fourth hour you are very glad to stuff anything like bottles of Mother Somebody's Syrup through a gap in the nearest hedge.

It was at about that stage that word reached us of one or two men falling out from the rear companies. At this "the Peacemaker" began jogging up and down the left of our Company—we march on the right of the road in France—and, for all his sore heels and tremendous coat, showing the skittishness of a two-year-old. And he's even good years older than any of the rest of us, or than anyone else in the Company. I chipped my fellows into starting up another song, and my Platoon Sergeant cheerfully passed the word

round that if anybody in No. 1 dared to fall out he'd disembowel him with a tin-opener.

As an actual fact not a single "A" Company man did fall out, though in the last lap I was a bit nervy about old Tommy Dodd in 3 Section, whose rifle I carried, and one or two others. At the end "the Peacemaker" was carrying the rifles of two men, and everybody was thankful for walls to lean against when we stood easy in this village. My chaps were splendid.

"Stick it, Tommy Dodd!" I said to the old boy once, near the end. His good old face was all twisted with the pain of his feet and the mass of extra kit which no doubt his wife had made him carry.

"Stick it!" says he, with his twisted grin. "Why, I'm just beginning to enjoy it, sir. Just getting into me stride, I am. I wouldn't 've missed this for all the beer in England, sir. But you wait till we get alongside them blighted Boches, sir, an' see if I don't smarten some of 'em for this. I'll give 'em sore 'eels!"

It was only by lying to the extent of at least ten years that the old thing was able to enlist, and you couldn't get him to "go sick" if you drove him with a whip. The only way old Tommy

Dodd's spirit could be broken would be if you sent him to the depot and refused him his chance of "smartening them blighted Boches."

Everyone in the village was asleep when we got there, but on the door we found chalked up (as it might be "Lot So-and-so" at a sale) "1 Officer, 25 men, 'A' Coy.," and so on. We officers shed our packs and coats in the road—the joy of that shedding!—and went round with our platoons picking out their quarters, and shepherding them in before they could fall asleep. We knocked up the inhabitants, who came clattering out in clogs, with candle-ends in big lanterns. Most remarkably cheery and good-natured they all seemed, for that time of day; mostly women, you know, you don't find many home-staying men in France today. The most of the men's billets are barns and granaries, and there is a good supply of straw. I can tell you there was no need to sound any "Lights Out" or "Last Post." No. 1 Platoon just got down into their straw like one man, and no buck at all about it.

Then when we had seen them all fixed up, we foraged round for our own billets. Mine proved a little brick-floored apartment, in which you might just swing a very small cat if you felt like that

kind of jugglery, opening out of the main room, or bar, of an estaminet—the French village version of our inn, you know. Here, when they had had their sleep, the men began to flock this afternoon for refreshment. The drinking is quite innocent, mostly café au lait, and occasionally cider. The sale of spirits is (very wisely) entirely prohibited. It's most amusing to hear our chaps "slinging the bat." They are still at the stage of thinking that if they shout loudly enough they must be understood, and it is rather as a sort of good-humoured concession to the eccentricities of our French hosts, than with any idea of tackling another language, that they throw in their "Bon jor's" and the like.

"Got any pang, Mum?" they ask cheerfully. Another repeats it, in a regular open-air auction shout, with a grin and an interrogative "Compree?" at the end of each remark. Some, still at the top of their voices, are even bold enough to try instructing the French. "Françaisee, 'pang'—see? In Engletairy, 'bread'—see? Compree? B-R-E-A-D, bread." And the kindly French women, with their smiling lips and anxious, war-worn eyes, they nod and acquiesce, and bustle in and out with yard-long loaves and bowls of coffee of

precisely the same size as the diminutive wash-hand basin in my room. I tell you one's heart warms to these French women, in their workman-like short frocks (nearly all black), thick, home-knitted stockings, and wooden clogs. How they keep the heels of their stockings so dry and clean, I can't think. The subject, you notice, is one of peculiar interest to all of us just now—sock heels, I mean.

There have been a good many jobs for officers all day, so far, and only an hour or so for rest. But we have arranged for a sumptuous repast —roast duck and sausages and treacle pudding— at six o'clock, and the C.O. and Providence permitting, we shall all turn in before eight. We don't expect to move on from here till early the day after to-morrow, and shall have our transport with us by then. I gather we shall march all the way from here to the trenches; and really, you know, it's an excellent education for all of us in the conditions of the country. People at home don't realise what a big thing the domestic side of soldiering is. Our C.O. knew, of course, because he is an old campaigner. That's why, back there in England, he harried his officers as he did. We have to know all there is to know

about the feet, boots, socks, food, cleanliness, and health of each one of our men, and it has been made part of our religion that an officer must never, never, never eat, sleep, or rest until he has personally seen to it that each man in his command is provided for in these respects. He has made it second nature to us, and since we reached France one has learned the wisdom of his teaching. I must clear out now—a pow-wow at Battalion Orderly Room: the village Ecole des Filles. The weather has completely changed. There's a thin, crisp coating of snow over everything, and it's clear and dry and cold. We're all rather tired, but fit as fleas, and awfully thankful to be getting so near the firing line. So make your mind quite easy about your

"*Temporary Gentleman.*"

THE TALE OF A TUB

If inclined to revile me for apparent neglect of you these last few days, be charitable and revile lightly.

It's astonishing how full one's days are. And then when late evening arrives and arrangements for next morning are complete, and one's been the round of one's platoon billets and seen all in order for the night—then, instead of being free to write one's own letters, one must needs wade through scores written by the men of one's platoon, who —lucky beggars!—have three times the leisure we can ever get. Their letters must all be censored and initialed, you see. Rightly enough, I suppose, the military principle seems to be never to allow the private soldier to be burdened by any responsibility which an officer can possibly take. The giving away of military information in a letter, whether inadvertently or knowingly, is, of course, a serious offence. (German spies are everywhere.) When I have endorsed all my

platoon's letters, the responsibility for their contents rests on my shoulders and the men run no risks.

If I were an imitative bird now, you would find my letter reading something after this style:

"Just a few lines to let you know how we are getting on, hoping this finds you in the pink as it leaves me at present. We are getting very near the Germans now, and you can take it from me they'll get what for when we come up with 'em. The grub here is champion, but we are always ready for more, and I shan't be sorry to get that parcel you told me of. Please put in a few fags next time. The French people have a queer way of talking so you can't always understand all they say, but they're all right, I can tell you, when you get to know 'em, and I can sling their bat like one o'clock now. It's quite easy once you get the hang of it, this bong jor and pang parley voo. Milk is lay, and not too easy to get. The boys are all in the pink, and hoping you're the same, so no more at present," etc.

One sometimes gets mad with them for trifles, but for all the things that really matter—God bless 'em all! By Jove! they *are* Britons. They're always "in the pink" and most things are "cham-

pion," and when the ration-wagon's late and a man drops half his whack in the mud, he grins and says, "The Army of to-day's all *right*"; and that, wait till he gets into the trenches, he'll smarten the Boches up for that! Oh, but they are splendid; and though one gets into the way of thinking and saying one's own men are the best in the Army, yet, when one means business one knows very well the whole of the New Army's made of the same fine stuff. Why, in my platoon, and in our Company for that matter, they are every mother's son of them what people at home call rough, ignorant fellows. And I admit it. Rough they certainly are; and ignorant, too, by school standards. But, by Jingo! their hearts are in the right place, and I'd back any one of them against any two goose-stepping Boches in the Kaiser's Prussian Guard.

And, with it all, mind you, they're so English. I mean they are *kind*, right through to their bones; good fellows, you know; sportsmen, every one of 'em; fellows you'd trust to look after your mother. They're as keen as mustard to get to the strafing of Boches; but that's because the Boche is the enemy, war is war, and duty is duty. You couldn't make haters of 'em, not if you paid

'em all ambassadorial salaries to cultivate a scowl and sing hymns of hate. Not them. Not all the powers of Germany and Austria could make baby-killers, women-slayers, and church-destroyers of these chaps of ours. If I know anything about it, they are fine soldiers, but the Kaiser himself—"Kayser," they call him—couldn't make brutes and bullies of 'em. Warm their blood—and, mind you, you can do it easily enough, even with a football in a muddy field, when they've been on carrying fatigues all day—and, by Jove! there's plenty of devil in 'em. God help the men in front of 'em when they've bayonets fixed! But withal they're English sportsmen all the time, and a French child can empty their pockets and their haversacks by the shedding of a few tears.

But I run on (and my candle runs down) and I give you no news. This is our last night here, and I ought to be asleep in my flea-bag, for we make an early start to-morrow for our first go in the trenches. But it's jolly yarning here to you, while the whole village is asleep, and no chits are coming in, and the Battalion Orderly Room over the way is black and silent as the grave, except for the sentry's footsteps in the mud.

I'm in rather good quarters here, in the Mayor's house. When we left that first village—I'm afraid I haven't written since—we had three days of marching, sleeping in different billets each night. Here in this place, twelve miles from the firing line, we've had five days; practising with live bombs, getting issues of trench kit, and generally making last preparations. To-morrow night we sleep in tents close to the line and begin going into trenches for instruction.

But, look here, before I turn in, I must just tell you about this household and my hot bath last night. The town is a queer little place; farming centre, you know. The farm-houses are all inside the village, and mine—M. le Maire's—is one of the best. From the street you see huge great double doors, that a laden wagon can drive through, in a white wall. That is the granary wall. You enter by the big archway into a big open yard, the centre part of which is a wide-spreading dung-hill and reservoir. All round the yard are sheds and stables enclosing it, and facing you at the back the low, long white house, with steps leading up to the front door, which opens into the kitchen. This is also the living-room of M. le Maire and his aged mother. Their family lived here before

the Revolution, and the three sturdy young women and one old, old man employed on the farm, all live in the house.

M. le Maire is a warm man, reputed to have a thorough mastery of the English tongue, among other things, as a result of "college" education. So I gather from the really delightful old mother, who, though bent nearly double, appears to run the whole show, including the Town Hall opposite, our Battalion Headquarters. I have never succeeded in inducing the Mayor to speak a word of English, but he has a little dictionary like a prayer-book, with perfectly blinding print, and somehow carries on long and apparently enjoyable conversations with my batman (who certainly has no French), though, as I say, one never heard a word of English on his lips.

I know what the newspapers are. They pretend to give you the war news. But I'll bet they'll tell you nothing of yesterday's really great event, when the Commander of No. 1 Platoon took a hot bath, as it were under municipal auspices, attended by two Company Headquarters orderlies, his own batman, and the cordially expressed felicitations of his brother officers, not to mention the mayoral household, and the whole of No. 1

Platoon, which is billeted in the Mayor's barns and outbuildings. Early in the day the best wash-tub had been commandeered for this interesting ceremony, and I fancy it has an even longer history behind it than the Mayor's pre-Revolution home. It is not definitely known that Marie Antoinette used this tub, bathing being an infrequent luxury in her day; but if she had been cursed with our modern craze for washing, and chanced to spend more than a year or so in this mud-set village of M——, she certainly would have used this venerable vessel, which, I gather, began life as the half of a cider barrel, and still does duty of that sort on occasion, and as a receptacle for the storing of potatoes and other nutritious roots, when not required for the more intimate service of M. le Maire's mother, for the washing of M. le Maire's corduroys and underwear, or by M. le Maire himself, at the season of Michaelmas, I believe, in connection with the solemn rite of his own annual bath, which festival was omitted this year out of deference to popular opinion, because of the war.

The household of the Mayor, headed by this respected functionary himself, received me at the portals of his ancestral home and ushered me most

kindly and graciously, if with a dash of grave, half-pitying commiseration, to what I thought at first was the family vault, though, as I presently discovered, it was in reality the mayoral salon or best parlour—as seen in war time—draped in sacking and year-old cobwebs. Here, after some rather embarrassing conversation, chiefly gesticulatory on my side—my conversational long suit is "Pas du tout! Merci beaucoup," and "Mais oui, Madame," with an occasional "Parfaitement," stirred in now and again, not with any meaning, but as a kind of guarantee of good faith, because I think it sounds amiable, if not indeed like my lambs in their billets, "Bien gentil," and "Très convenable, Monsieur." It is thus they are invariably described to me when I go inspecting. As I was saying, here I was presently left alone with the household cat, two sick rabbits in a sort of cage which must once have housed a cockatoo or parrot, my own little towel (a torn half, you know, designed to reduce valise weight), my sponge (but, alack! not my dear old worn-out nail-brush, now lying in trenches on Salisbury Plain), and the prehistoric wash-tub, now one quarter filled by what the Mayor regarded, I gathered, as perhaps the largest quantity of hot water ever accum-

ulated in one place—two kettles and one oil-can full, carried by the orderlies.

The cat and the rabbits watched my subsequent proceedings with the absorbed interest of an intelligent mid-Victorian infant at its first pantomime. The cat, I blush to say, was female, and old enough to know better, but I trust the rabbits were of my own sex. Anyhow, they were sick, so perhaps it doesn't matter. The entire mayoral household, with my batman and others, were assembled in the big kitchen, separated from the chamber of my ablutions only by a door having no kind of fastening and but one hinge. Their silence was broken only by an occasional profound sigh from the Mayor's aged mother, and three sounds of reflective expectoration at considerable intervals from the Mayor himself. So I judged my bathing to be an episode of rare and anxious interest to the mayoral family.

My feet I anointed copiously with a disgusting unguent of great virtue—it's invaluable for lighting braziers when one's only fuel is muddy coke and damp chits—called anti-frostbite grease, that is said to guard us from the disease known as "Trench Feet," rumoured prevalent in our sector by reason of the mellow quality and depth of

its mud, which, whilst apparently almost liquid, yet possesses enough body and bouquet—remember how you used to laugh at our auction catalogue superlatives in cellar lots?—to rob a man of his boots at times. For my hands—chipped about a bit now—I used carbolated vaseline. (Do you remember the preternaturally slow and wall-eyed salesman, with the wart, in the Salisbury shop where we bought it?) And then, clothed most sumptuously in virginal underwear, I crawled into my flea-bag, there to revel from 10.40 P.M. to 6 A.M., as I am about to do now, less one hour in the morning. How I wish one could consciously enjoy the luxury of sleep while sleeping! Good night and God bless you! God bless all the sweet, brave waiting women of England, and France, and Russia; and I wish I could send a bit of my clean comfort to-night to as many as may be of our good chaps, and France's *bon camarades*, out here.

When next I write we shall have seen a bit of the trenches, I hope, and so then you should have something more like real news from your

"*Temporary Gentleman.*"

THE TRENCHES AT LAST

You must forgive my not having sent anything but those two Field Service post cards for a whole week, but, as our Canadian subaltern, Fosset, says, it really has been "some" week. My notion was to write you fully my very first impression of the trenches, but the chance didn't offer, and perhaps it's as well. It couldn't be fresher in my mind than it is now, and yet I understand it more, and see the thing more intelligently than on the first night.

We are now back in the village of B——, three miles from our trenches. We are here for three days' alleged rest, and then, as a Battalion, take over our own Battalion sub-sector of trenches. So far, we have only had forty-eight hours in, as a Battalion; though, as individuals, we have had more. When we go in again it will be as a Battalion, under our own Brigade and Divisional arrangements, to hold our own Brigade front, and be relieved later by the other two Battalions of our Brigade.

"A" Company is, I am sorry to say, in tents for these three days out; tents painted to look like mud and grass (for the benefit of the Boche airmen) and not noticeably more comfortable than mud and grass. An old fellow having the extraordinary name of Bonaparte Pinchgare, has been kind enough to lend us his kitchen and scullery for officers' mess and quarters; and we, like the men, are contriving to have a pretty good time, in despite of chill rain and all-pervading mud. We are all more or less caked in mud, but we have seen Huns, fired at 'em, been fired at by them, spent hours in glaring through rag and tin-decked barbed wire at their trenches, and generally feel that we have been blooded to trench warfare. We have only lost two men, and they will prove to be only slightly wounded, I think; one, before he had ever set foot in a trench—little Hinkson of my No. 2 section—and the other, Martin, of No. 3 Platoon, only a few hours before we came out.

Hinkson was pipped by a chance bullet in the calf of the leg, as we passed through a wood, behind the support trench. Very likely a Boche loosed that bullet off in mere idleness, a couple of thousand yards away; and I doubt if it will mean

even a Blighty for Hinkson. He may be put right in the Field Ambulance or Clearing Station near here, or, at farthest, down at the Base. Or he may chance to go across to Blighty—the first casualty in the Battalion. The little chap was furiously angry over getting knocked out before he could spot a Hun through the foresight of his rifle, but his mate, Kennedy, has sworn to lay out a couple of Boches for Hinkson, before he gets back to us, and Kennedy will do it.

First impressions! Do you know, I think my first impression was of the difficulty of finding one's way about in a maze of muddy ditches which all looked exactly alike, despite a few occasional muddy notice-boards perched in odd corners: "Princes Street," "Sauchiehall Street," "Manchester Avenue," "Stinking Sap," "Carlisle Road," and the like. I had a trench map of the sector, but it seemed to me one never could possibly identify the different ways, all mud being alike, and no trench offering anything but mud to remember it by. In the front or fire-trench itself, the firing line, one can hop up on the fire-step, look round quickly between bullets, and get a bearing. But in all these interminable communication and branch trenches where one goes to

and fro, at a depth varying from six to ten or twelve feet, seeing only clay and sky, how the dickens could one find the way?

And yet, do you know, so quickly are things borne in upon you in this crude, savage life of raw realities, so narrow is your world, so vital your need of knowing it; so unavoidable is your continuous alertness, and so circumscribed the field of your occupation, that I feel now I know nothing else in the world quite so well and intimately as I know that warren of stinking mud: the two subsectors in which I spent last week. Manchester Avenue, Carlisle Road, Princes Street, with all their side alleys and boggy by-ways! Why, they are so photographed on the lining of my brain that, if I were an artist (instead of a very muddy subaltern ex-clerk) I could paint the whole thing for you—I wish I could. Not only do I know them, but I've merely to shut my eyes to see any and every yard of them; I can smell them now; I can feel the precise texture of their mud. I know their hidden holes and traps, where the water lies deep. I know to an inch where the bad breaks are in the duck-boards that you can't see because the yellow water covers them. Find one's way! I know them far better than I know the Thames

Embankment, the Strand, or Brixton Hill! That's not an exaggeration.

Duck-boards, by the way, or duck-walks, are a kindly invention (of the R.E., I suspect) to save soldiers from the bottomless pit, and to enable officers on duty to cover rather more than a hundred yards an hour in getting along their line of trench. Take two six- or eight-feet lengths of two inches by four inches' scantling; nail two or three inch bits of batten across these with two or three inch gaps between, the width of the frame being, say, eighteen inches. Thus you have a grating six or eight feet long and narrow enough to lie easily in the bottom of a trench. If these gratings rest on trestles driven deep down into the mud, and your trenches are covered by them throughout—well, then you may thank God for all His mercies and proceed to the more interesting consideration of strafing Boches, and avoiding being strafed by them. If you haven't got these beneficent inventions of the R.E., and you are in trenches like ours, then you will devote most of your energies to strafing the R.E., or some other unseen power for good, through your own headquarters, for a supply of duck-walks, and you will (if you are wise) work night and day without check,

in well and truly laying every single length you can acquire.

("Acquire" is a good, sound word. I would never blame a man for stealing duck-walks from any source whatsoever—providing, of course, he is not so far lost to all sense of decency as to steal 'em from "A" Company; and even then, if he could manage it, his cleverness would almost deserve forgiveness; and, equally, of course, that he's going to use 'em for their legitimate purpose, and not just to squat on in a dug-out; least of all for the absolutely criminal purpose of using as fuel.)

"What a fuss you make about mere things to walk on!" perhaps you'll say. "I thought the one thing really important was getting to grips with the enemy." Mmmf! Yes. Quite so. It is. But, madam, how to do it? "There be ways and means to consider, look you, whateffer," as Billy Morgan says. (Billy was the commander of No. 2 Platoon, you remember, and now, as reserve Machine-Gun officer, swanks insufferably about "the M.G. Section," shoves most of his Platoon work upon me, and will have a dug-out of his own. We rot him by pretending to attribute these things to the influence of his exalted

compatriot, the Minister of Munitions. As a fact, they are due to his own jolly hard work, and really first-rate abilities.)

This trench warfare isn't by any means the simple business you might suppose, and neither, of course, is any other kind of warfare. There can be no question of just going for the enemy bald-headed. He wishes you would, of course; just as we wish to goodness *he* would. You have to understand that up there about the front line, the surrounding air and country can at any moment be converted into a zone of living fire—gas, projectiles, H.E. (High Explosive, you know) flame, bullets, bursting shrapnel. If you raise a finger out of trenches by daylight, you present Fritz with a target, which he will very promptly and gratefully take, and blow to smithereens. That's understood, isn't it? Right. To be able to fight, in any sort of old way at all, you must continue to live—you and your men. To continue to live you must have cover. Hence, nothing is more important than to make your trenches habitable, and feasible; admitting, that is, of fairly easy and quick communication.

To live, you see, you must eat and drink. The trenches contain no A B C 's. Every crumb of

bread, every drop of tea or water, like every cartridge you fire, must be carried up from the rear on men's shoulders, along many hundreds of yards of communicating trenches. Also, in case you are suddenly attacked, or have to attack, quick movement is vital. Nature apparently abhors a trench, which is a kind of a vacuum, and not precisely lovable, anyhow; and, in this part of the world, she proceeds wherever possible to fill it with water. Pumps? Why, certainly. But clay and slush sides cave in. Whizz-bangs and H.E. descend from on high displacing much porridge-like soil. Men hurrying to and fro day and night, disturb and mash up much earth in these ditches. And, no matter how or why, there is mud; mud unspeakable and past all computation. Consider it quietly for a moment, and you will feel as we do about duck-walks—I trust the inventor has been given a dukedom—and realise the pressing importance of various material details leading up to that all-important strafing of Boches.

But there, the notion of trying to tell you about trenches in one letter is, I find, hopelessly beyond me, and would only exhaust you, even if I could bring it off. I can only hope gradually to get

some sort of a picture into your mind, so that you will have a background of sorts for such news of our doings as I'm able to send you as we go on. Just now, I am going to tackle an alarming stack of uncensored letters from Nos. 1 and 2 Platoons —some of the beggars appear to be extraordinarily polygamous in the number of girls they write to; bless 'em!—and then to turn in and sleep. My goodness, it's a fine thing, sleep, out of trenches! But I'll write again, probably to-morrow.

The men are all remarkably fit and jolly. One or two old hands here have told me the line we are taking over is really pretty bad. Certainly it was a revelation to our fellows, after the beautiful, clean tuppenny-tubes of trenches we constructed on Salisbury Plain. But one hears no grousing at all, except of the definitely humorous and rather pleased kind—rather bucked about it, you know—the men are simply hungry for a chance to "get" at the Hun, and they work like tigers at trench betterment. We are all well and jolly, and even if sometimes you don't hear often, there's not the slightest need to worry in any way about your

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A DISSERTATION ON MUD

THE second of our rest days is over, and to-morrow night we shall go into the firing line and relieve the ——s. We shall march back the way we came out, down the sad-looking green valley round the lips of which some of our batteries are hidden; through the deserted streets of ——, with its boarded-up shops and houses; on over the weed-grown railway track, through a little village whose church is still unbroken; though few of its cottage windows have any glass left in them; across the busy little river to Ambulance Corner —a favourite target for Boche shells, that bit of road—and so through the wooded hollow where the German gas lies deadly thick when it comes, into the foot of Manchester Avenue, the long communication trench leading up to the Battalion's trench headquarters in the support line, where "A" Company will branch off to the right, "B" to the left, and "C" to the extreme left of our sub-sector.

That town I mentioned—not the little village close to Ambulance Corner, where most roofs and walls show shell-torn rents and a few are smashed to dust—is rather like a city of the dead. It has a cathedral which the gentle Hun has ranged on with thoughtful frightfulness. But though, under the guidance of his aerial observers, the Boche has smashed up that cathedral pretty thoroughly, and its tower has great gaping chunks riven out of its sides by shells, yet, as folk say miraculously, its crowning attraction, a monstrous gilt figure of the Madonna and Child, thirty to fifty feet high, remains intact. But this remarkable gilt statue has been undermined at its base by H.E. shell, and now hangs over at right angles to the street far below it—a most extraordinary sight. The devout naturally claim that no German projectile will prove powerful enough to lower the sacred emblem any farther. Boche savagery in France has not weakened anyone's faith, I think; possibly the reverse.

A foundry or factory near by is now a tangled mass of scrap iron, and as one marches through the town one has queer intimate glimpses of deserted bedroom interiors, with homely furnishings exposed to all the weather, where a shell has sliced

one wall clean down from a first or second storey and left the ground floor intact.

But I was going to tell you about trenches. When I first began to walk up Manchester Avenue, my thought was, "There's nothing much to grumble at here. I call this pretty good. A little sloppy under foot perhaps, but really nothing to write home about." I've often laughed at that since. For several hundred yards it cuts through a ridge of chalk. It is wide enough to enable one to pass a man in it anywhere with comfort. Its parapet and parados tower white, clean, and unbroken a foot or so over your head. Its sides are like the sides of a house or a tunnel; good, dry, solid chalk, like our Salisbury trenches, with never a sign of caving in about them. And on the hard bottom under foot—perhaps two or three inches of nice clean chalky slime and water. It has a gentle gradient which makes it self-draining.

You could easily go right up it to Battalion Headquarters in the support trench in ordinary marching boots, and be none the worse. And since then I've known what it means to get a bootful of muddy water, when wearing trench boots; rubber thigh-boots, you know, with straps buckling to your belt. The change begins a little

way above the Battalion Headquarters dug-out, in support line. You leave the chalk behind you and get into clay, and then you leave the clay behind you and get into yellow porridge and treacle. And then you come to a nice restful stretch of a couple of hundred yards or so, in which you pray for more porridge; and it seems you're never coming to any more. This is a vein of glue in the section which "A" will go to-morrow night.

"Very old and curious!" "Remarkably fine, full body!" Oh! that glue vein is from the end bin, genuine old-vatted, I can assure you. It must have eaten up some hundreds of pairs of boots by now, and a regular Noah's Ark full of trench stores, ammunition, and other useful material.

The glue vein probably had a bottom in bygone days, but now I fancy the Hun has knocked the bottom out of it. In any case, we never met anyone who had found bottom in that bit of line, and as the tallest man in the company is only six foot two, I hope we never shall. At first you think you will skip along quick, like skating fast on very thin ice, and with feet planted far apart, so as to get the support of the trench sides. That bit of trench is possessed of devils, and they laugh

when you stretch your legs, meaning to get through with it as quick as you can. The glue's so thick and strong, after the soupy stuff you've been wading through, that you welcome the solid look of it. (That's where the devils begin their chuckling.)

Perhaps at the first few steps you only sink about a foot, leaving your knees easily clear. "Oh! come!" you say (and that's where the devils of the glue patch laugh out loud). At the next step you go in a little deeper, and in your innocence give quite a sharp tug to lift your foot. You lift it all right, perhaps half-way up the leg of your boot, possibly ripping off a brace button in the process, if you've been unwise enough to fasten up the top straps of your boots that way. (The devils go on laughing.) Then you pause, reflectively, while shoving your foot down in your boot again, and take a good look round you, wondering what sort of a place you've struck. (This is where the devils have to hold their sides in almost painful hilarity.)

While you reflect you sink, so slowly and softly that you don't notice it till you try the next step. And then, with the devils of that section roaring their ugly Hunnish heads off all round you, if

you have no better luck than Tommy Dodd had, his first night in, you may continue reflecting for quite a long while, till somebody comes along who knows that particular health resort. Then two or three Samaritans with picks and shovels and a post or two will be brought, and, very laboriously, you'll be dug and levered out; possibly with your boots, possibly without either them or your socks.

But what reduces the devils to helpless, tearful contortions of merriment, is a coincidental decision on the part of a Boche gunner to start peppering that bit of trench with shrap., or a machine-gun, during your reflective period. Then it's great; a really first-class opportunity for reviewing the errors of your past life.

After this substantial *pièce de résistance* (yes, thanks, I'm progressing very nicely with my French this term), you come to a delicately refreshing dessert in Sauchiehall Street, where the water lies very deep in most parts, but so sweetly liquid as to wash the glue well off up to our coat pockets. This innocent stuff can be pumped out quite easily, and is pumped out every day, into a gully, which we devoutly hope leads well into a Boche sap. But pump as you will, it fills up very

rapidly. And so, with new washed boots (and coat pockets) to Whizz-bang Corner, where Sauchiehall Street enters the fire trench, and the Hun loves to direct his morning and evening hymns of hate in the hope of catching tired ration-carriers, and, no doubt, of spilling their rations. It was there that Martin of No. 3 Platoon got his quietener on the morning we came out. But with luck and no septic trouble, he'll be back in a month or so. The surroundings are a bit toxic, as you may imagine. That's why, after even the slightest wound, they inoculate with anti-tetanus—marvellously successful stuff.

The fire trench in this particular bit is rather a mockery, as "the Peacemaker" said, when he tried to climb out of it, our first night in, to have a look at the barbed wire and No Man's Land. He had a revolver in one hand and a bomb in the other, but I am pleased to say the safety-pin of that bomb was efficient; and, in any case, I relieved him of it after he fell back the second time. The sides of that trench have been so unmercifully pounded by the Boche, and the rain has been so persistent of late that the porridge here is more like gruel than the breakfast dish, and the average sand-bag in the parapet, when not submerged,

is as unfriendly to get a grip on, as one of those crustaceous pink bombs they sometimes swindle you with at restaurants. You know, the kind you chase round your plate and find splinter-proof.

Thirty or forty yards north from Whizz-bang Corner, in the fire trench, you come to a loop turn to the rear called Whitehall, not because there's a War Office there, but because there's a queer little vein of chalk which disappointingly peters out again in less than a dozen paces. That leads to the Company Headquarters dug-out; an extraordinary hole, I thought, when I first saw it; a jolly nice, homely dug-out I think it now, and with a roof—well, not shell-proof, you know, but watertight, and quite capable of standing a whizz or a grenade, or anything short of serious H.E. You stride over a good little dam and then down two steps to get into it, and it has a real door, carried up, I suppose, from the village in the rear. It also has a gilt-edged looking-glass, a good packing-case table, the remains of two wooden chairs, two shelves made of rum-jar cases, and two good solid wire-strung bunks, one over the other. There's no doubt it is some dug-out.

And, madam, don't you go for to think that there's anything contemptible about our trenches,

anyhow. Perhaps I pitched it a bit strong about that glue patch. In any case, I promise you two things: (1) They'll be very different trenches before long if "A" Company has two or three turns of duty in them. (2) They're every bit as good as, and a bit better than, the trenches opposite, where the Hun is; and I know it *because I've been there.* I meant to have told you of that to-night, but I've left it too late, and must wait for my next letter. But it's quite right. I've had a look at their front line and found it distinctly worse than ours, and got back without a scratch, to sign myself still your

"*Temporary Gentleman.*"

TAKING OVER ON A QUIET NIGHT

LAST evening brought an end to our rest cure, as I told you it would, and saw us taking over out section of the firing line. Now I have just turned into the Company dug-out for a rest, having been pretty much on the hop all night except for a short spell between two and four this morning. As I think I told you, this is not at all a bad dug-out, and quite weather-proof. It has two decent bunks one over the other. We all use it as a mess, and "the Peacemaker," Taffy Morgan, and myself use it for sleeping in; Tony and "the Infant" kipping down (when they get the chance) in a little tiny dug-out that we made ourselves when we were in here for instruction, just the other side of Whizz-bang Corner, in the fire trench.

You remember "the Infant," don't you? No. 4 Platoon. His father's doctoring now in the R.A.M.C. He's a nice boy, and has come on a lot since we got out here. He was to have been

a land surveyor, or something of that sort, and has a first-rate notion of trench work and anything like building.

In writing to you I'd like to avoid, if I could, what seems to be a pretty common error among men at the front, and one that leads to some absurd misapprehensions among people at home. I remember listening once in a tram-car at home to two Tommies, one of whom had returned from the front. The other was asking him how they managed in the matter of shifting wounded men back to some place where they could be attended to.

"Oh! that's simple enough," said the chap who'd been out. "They've a regular routine for that. You see, there are always barges waiting, and when you're wounded they just dump you on board a barge and take you down the canal to where the dressing station is."

"I see; so that's the way it's done," said the other man.

And I could see that the impression left on his mind was that barges were in waiting on a canal right along the five hundred miles of Franco-British line.

You see what I mean. A fellow out here knows

only his own tiny bit of front, and he's very apt to speak of it as if it were *the* Front, and folk at home are apt to think that whatever is applicable to their man's particular mile or so is applicable to the whole Front. Which, of course, is wildly wrong and misleading. When in trenches one battalion may find itself in a wood, another on a naked hillside, one in the midst of a ruined village, with the cellars of smashed cottages for dug-outs, and another with its trenches running alongside a river or canal. So don't make the mistake of thinking that what I tell you applies to the Front generally, although in a great many matters it may be typical enough.

Now you'd like to know about the business of taking over these trenches. Well, this was the way of it. "The Peacemaker," our noble Company Commander, came on here in advance yesterday afternoon, with the Company Sergeant-Major. Our Company S.M., by the way, is a remarkably fine institution, and, I think, the only real ex-regular we have in the Company. He's an ex-N.C.O. of Marines, and a really splendid fellow, who is out now for a V.C., and we all hope he'll get it. He and "the Peacemaker" came along about three hours ahead of us, leaving me to bring

the Company. "The Peacemaker" went carefully all over this line with the O.C. of the Company we relieved, noted the sentry posts and special danger spots—unhealthy places, you know, more exposed to Boche fire than others—and generally took stock and made his plans for us.

I forgot to say that a Sergeant from each platoon accompanied "the Peacemaker" and the S.M., so as to be able to guide their respective platoons in to their own bits of the line when they arrived. Then the S.M. checked over all the trench stores —picks, shovels, wire, pumps, small-arm ammunition, rockets, mud-scoops, trench repair material, and all that—with the list held by the S.M. of the Company we were relieving, which our own beloved "Peacemaker," had to sign "certified correct," you know. Meantime, "the Peacemaker" took over from the other O.C. Company a report of work done and to be done—repairing parapets, laying duck-walks, etc.—though in this case I regret to remark the only very noticeable thing was the work to be done, or so it seems to us —and generally posted himself up and got all the tips he could.

Just about dusk "A" Company led the way out of B——, and marched the way I told you

of to Ambulance Corner. Needless to say, they presented a fine soldierly appearance, led and commanded as they were for the time by your "Temporary Gentleman." There was a certain liveliness about Ambulance Corner when we reached it, as there so frequently is, and I am sorry to say poor "B" Company in our rear had two men wounded, one fatally. I took "A" Company at the double, in single file, with a yard or so between men, across the specially exposed bit at the corner, and was thankful to see the last of 'em bolt into the cover of Manchester Avenue without a casualty. It gave me some notion of the extra anxiety that weighs on the minds of O.C. Companies who take their responsibilities seriously, as I think most of 'em do.

Then, when we were getting near Whizz-bang Corner, we were met by the four platoon N.C.O.'s who had gone on in advance with the Coy. S.M., and they guided the platoons to their respective sections of our line. Meantime, you understand, not a man of the Company we were relieving had left the line. The first step was for us to get our platoon Sergeants to post sentries to relieve each one of those of the other Company, on the fire-step, and we ourselves were on hand with each

group, to see that the reliefs thoroughly understood the information and instructions they got from the men they relieved. Then our advance N.C.O.'s showed the other men of their platoons such dug-outs as were available for them—a pretty thin lot in this section, but we shall tackle the job of increasing and improving 'em as soon as we can, while we Platoon Commanders had a buck with the Platoon Commanders of the other Company.

Finally, "the Peacemaker" shook hands with the O.C. of the Company we relieved outside Company Headquarters—that's this dug-out—the other fellow wished him luck, both of them, separately, telephoned down to Battalion Headquarters (in the support trenches) reporting the completion of the relief, and the last of the other Company filed away out down Sauchiehall Street to Manchester Avenue, billets and "alleged rest." As a matter of fact, they are to get some real rest, I believe, another Company of our Brigade being billeted in the village just behind the lines this week, to do all the carrying fatigues at night —bringing up trench-repair material and all that.

It was a quiet night, with no particular strafing, and that's all to the good, because, in the first

place, it gives us a better chance to study the line again by daylight, and, again, it enables us to get on quickly with certain very necessary trench repairs. We had half the Company working all night at the parapet, which had some very bad gaps, representing a serious multiplication of unhealthy spots, which have to be passed many times day and night, and must always be dangerous to pass. The Boche is pretty nippy in locating gaps of this sort and getting his snipers and machine-gunners to range on them, so that unless they are repaired casualties are certain. One repairs them by building up the gaps with sand-bags, and for these it is necessary to find approximately dry earth: a pretty difficult job in this section.

No strafing and a quiet night! I wonder how you, and people generally at home, interpret that? "The rest of the Front was quiet"; "Nothing of interest to report"; "Tactical situation unchanged," and so on. They are the most familiar report phrases, of course.

Well, there was a time last night, or, rather, between two and four this morning, when on our particular section there was no firing at all beyond the dropping rifle fire of the Boche sentries opposite and a similar desultory fire from our sentries.

Now and again a bullet so fired may get a man passing along a communication trench, or, more likely, of course, a man exposed, either on patrol in No Man's Land or in working on the parapet. More often they hit nobody. During the same time, in our particular section, a flare-light went up from the Boche line opposite, I suppose about every other minute. That's to give their sentries a chance of seeing any patrol we may have creeping about in their direction.

During all the rest of this quiet night of no strafing there was just "normal fire." That is to say, the Boche machine-guns sprayed our parapet and the intervening bit of No Man's Land, maybe, once every quarter of an hour. Their rifle fire was more continuous; their flares and parachute and star-lights the same. Eight or ten times in the night they gave us salvoes of a dozen whizz-bangs. Twice—once at about ten, and again about twelve—they gave our right a bit of a pounding with H.E., and damaged the parapet a little. Once they lobbed four rifle grenades over our left from a sap they have on that side. But we had been warned about that, and gave 'em gyp for it. We had a machine-gun trained on that sap-head of theirs, and plastered it pretty effec-

tually, so quickly that I think we must have got their grenadiers. They shut up very promptly, anyhow, and a bombing patrol of ours that got to the edge of their sap half an hour later found not a creature there to bomb.

Our fire during the night was similar to theirs, but a bit less. "The Peacemaker" has a strong prejudice in favour of saving his ammunition for use on real live targets, and I think he's right. We had one man slightly wounded, and that's all. And I think that must be admitted to be pretty good, seeing that we were at work along the parapet all night. That is a specimen of a really quiet night.

At Stand-to this morning Fritz plastered our parapet very thoroughly with his machine-guns, evidently thinking we were Johnny Raws. He wasted hundreds of rounds of ammunition over this. We were all prepared. Not a head showed, and my best sniper, Corporal May, got one of their machine-gun observers neatly through the head. Our lines are only a hundred yards apart just there.

But I must turn in, old thing, or I'll get no rest to-day. I know I haven't told you about the look I had at the Boche trenches. But perhaps

I'll have something better to tell when I next write.

Meantime, we are as jolly as sand-boys, and please remember that you need not be in the least anxious about your

"*Temporary Gentleman.*"

"WHAT IT'S LIKE"

THE wonder is, not that I didn't get the one post card you mention, but that you apparently have had everything I have written. Really, I do think the British postal arrangements out here are one of the most remarkable features of the war. The organisation behind our lines is quite extraordinary. Right up here in the firing line itself we get our letters and parcels every day. In the midst of a considerable bombardment I have seen fellows in artillery shelters in the line reading letters and opening parcels of little luxuries just received from home.

It's very nice of you to copy out my letters for friends at home to read. One simply can't hope to write to a number of different people, you know, because any spare time going one wants to use for sleep. I'm sorry I've omitted to tell you about some things I promised to explain, and must try to do better.

As to the time I saw into the Boche trenches

while we were in for instruction, that was nothing really; due to my own stupidity, as a matter of fact, and I dare say that's why I said nothing about it. It was our second night in for instruction, and the Company we were with was sending out a small bombing patrol, so, of course, I asked if I could go too, and see what was to be seen. The O.C. of the Company very kindly let me go, and take with me Corporal Slade, of my platoon, an excellent chap, and very keen to learn. I wish he could have had a better teacher.

While close to the Boche wire our little party—only five, all told—sighted a Boche patrol quite twenty strong, and our officer in charge very properly gave the word to retire to a flank and get back to our own trench, or, rather, to a sap leading from it, so as to give warning of the Boche patrol. This was where, in my experience, I went wrong and led Slade astray. I was very curious, of course, to have a good look at the Boche patrol—the first I'd seen of the enemy in the open—and, like a fool, managed to get detached from the other three of our lot, Slade sticking close to me with a confidence I didn't deserve.

When I realised that the others were clean out

of sight, and the Boche party too, I made tracks as quickly as I could—crawling, you know—as I believed for our line, cursing myself for not having a compass, a mistake you may be sure I shall not make again. Just then a regular fire-work display of flares went up from the Boche line, and they opened a hot burst of machine-gun fire. We lay as close as we could in the soggy grass, Slade and myself, and got no harm. Things were lively for a while, with lots of fire from both sides, and more light from both sides than was comfortable.

Later, when things had quietened down, we got on the move again, and presently, after a longish crawl through barbed wire, reached the parapet, and were just about to slide in, side by side, pretty glad to be back in the trench, when a fellow came round the traverse—we were just beside a traverse—growled something, and jabbed at Slade with his bayonet.

Bit confusing, wasn't it? Makes you think pretty quick. I suppose we realised we had struck the Boche line instead of our own in something under the twentieth part of a second, and what followed was too confused for me to remember much about. No doubt we both recognised the

necessity for keeping that chap quiet in the same fraction of time that we saw we had reached the wrong trenches. I can remember the jolly feeling of my two thumbs in his throat. It was jolly, really, though I dare say it will seem beastly to you. And I suspect Slade did for the chap. We were lying on a duck-board at the bottom of the trench, and I know my little trench dagger fell and made a horrid clatter, which I made sure would bring more Boches. But it didn't.

I am sorry to say I left the little dagger there, but I collared the Boche's rifle and bayonet, thinking that was the only weapon I had, and clean forgetting the two Mills bombs in my pockets. Slade was a perfect brick and behaved all through like the man he is. We were anxious to make tracks without unnecessary delay, but, being there, thought we might as well have a look at the trench. We crept along two bays without hearing or seeing a soul. And then we heard a man struggling in deep mud and cursing in fluent German. I've thought since, perhaps, we ought to have waited for him and tried a bomb on him. But at the same time came several other different voices, and I whispered to Slade to climb out and followed him myself without wasting any

time. The trench was a rotten bad one at this point, worse, I think, than any of ours. And I was thankful for it, because if it had been good those Boches would surely have been on us before we could get out. As it was, the mud held them, and the noises they made grovelling about in it prevented them from hearing our movements, though we made a good deal of noise, worrying through their wire, especially as I was dragging that Boche rifle, with bayonet fixed.

There were glimmering hints of coming daylight by the time we got into the open, which made it a bit easier to take a bearing, and also pretty necessary to have done with it quickly, because in another half-hour we should have been a target for the whole Boche line. Here again Slade was first-rate. He recognised a big shell-hole in the ground, which he had noticed was about fifty yards north of the head of a sap leading from our own line, and that guided us in to the same opening in our wire from which we had originally started. Fine chap, Slade! Three minutes later we were in our own trench, and I got a good tot of rum for both of us from the O.C. Company, who'd made up his mind he'd have to report us "Missing." So, you see, you didn't miss much

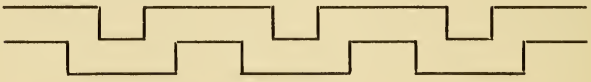
by not being told all about this before, except an instance of carelessness on my part, which might have been more costly if I hadn't had a most excellent chap with me. "The Peacemaker's" going to recommend him for Lance-Sergeant's stripes, by the way, when we get out of trenches this time.

You know, that question of yours about what it is really "like" here at the front isn't nearly so easy to answer as you might suppose. You must just be patient. I'll tell you things as I learn them and see them, gradually; and, gradually, too, you must try to piece 'em together till they make some sort of picture for you. If I were a real writer I might be able to make it all clear in one go, but—well, it's not easy.

I've told you about the trenches on the way up from Ambulance Corner, the communication trenches, that is, running up at right angles to the firing line. The chief difference between the firing line and the communication trenches, of course, is that it faces the Boche front line, running roughly parallel to it, and that, say eighteen inches above the bottom of it, there is a fire-step running along its front side. When you get up on that you have a fire position: that is, you

can see over the parapet, across No Man's Land, to the Boche front line, and fire a rifle.

The lines of trenches are not straight, of course. They curve about according to the nature of the ground. Running out from them on both sides towards the enemy lines there are saps, at the end of which we station listening posts at night with wired-up telephone and bell connections with the firing line. Roughly speaking, a fire trench is cut out rather like this:



with traverses every twenty or thirty paces, so as to make it impossible for an enemy on your flank to get what is called enfilade fire down and along the trench. Enfilade fire is deadly, of course. Fire from the front, on the other hand, if it falls short or overshoots the mark even by a yard lands in front of or behind your trench. You get that?

And what does it look like when one stares out from one's front trench? Well, it depends. It's always pretty queer, but it's queerest at night, when the Boche is sending up his ghostly flares, or when there's enough moonlight to make you

fancy all the time you can see all manner of things. First, there's your own parapet, anything from five to five-and-twenty feet of it, sloping gradually down to the open grass of No Man's Land. That's what stops the bullets destined for your head. When Boche shells are well enough placed to blow it in, you must build it up again as soon as you can, or the bit of trench behind it will be exposed, and as your men pass to and fro there will be casualties.

Well, then, anything from ten to twenty or thirty feet beyond the lip of your trench, your wire entanglements begin, and extend, say a good thirty or forty paces out into No Man's Land. You've seen barbed-wire entanglements in pictures: row after row of stakes (some of ours are iron screw standards now, that can be set up silently) laced together across and across by barbed wire, forming an obstacle which it is particularly difficult and beastly to get through, especially at night, which, of course, is the only time you could even approach it without being blown to bits.

Here and there all through our wire are old bells, tin cans, bits of flattened tin, and oddments of that sort hanging loosely, so that when even a

rat begins cavorting about in the wire at night your sentries know about it, and the Boche is neither so slim nor so agile as a rat. Say that he comes by night with bombs in his hand. One cannot throw a bomb with any accuracy of aim more than twenty or thirty yards. Boche finds himself stopped by our wire, say fifty or sixty yards from our line. If he slowly worms himself in, say twenty paces, without being heard—and he won't—and lobs a bomb at our line, imagine the hail of lead that's coming about him as he tries to wriggle his way back through the wire after shying his bomb!

But, as a matter of fact, the Boche is not good at that game. He does not shine at all at creeping on our line. When he leaves his trenches at all he seems to prefer coming out in pretty close formation, rubbing shoulders with his pals. Our fellows are a good deal better at sculling about over the sticks than he is.

Here and there in the wire, among the tin cans and things, you can see fluttering bits of weather-worn uniform and old rags, and, at times, things more gruesome. Beyond the wire you see the strip of No Man's Land. Where we are, the average width of it is round about a hundred

yards. In some places it's more, and in one place we can see, perhaps a mile off, it narrows down to much less than half that. Then begins the Boche wire, and through and across that you see the Boche front line, very much like your own, too much like your own to be very easily distinguished from it at night.

But that's a wonderful thing, that strip we call No Man's Land, running from the North Sea to Switzerland, five hundred miles. All the way along that line, day and night, without a moment's cessation, through all these long months, men's eyes have been glaring across that forsaken strip, and lead has been flying to and fro over it. To show yourself in it means death. But I have heard a lark trilling over it in the early morning as sweetly as any bird ever sang over an English meadow. A lane of death, five hundred miles long, strewn from end to end with the remains of soldiers! And to either side of it, throughout the whole of these five hundred miles, a warren of trenches, dug-outs, saps, tunnels, underground passages, inhabited, not by rabbits, but by millions of rats, it's true, and millions of hiving, busy men, with countless billions of rounds of death-dealing ammunition, and a complex organisation as

closely ordered and complete as the organisation of any city in England!

It's also inhabited at this moment by one man who simply must stop scribbling, and have some grub before going on duty. This one among the millions, with the very healthy appetite, manages, in despite of all the strafing, to think quite a lot about you, and hopes you will go on thinking equally cheerily of him—your

"*Temporary Gentleman.*"

THE DUG-OUT

HERE's an odd coincidence. The second sentence in your letter that reached me last night (with our rations of candles and coke) says: "Do tell me just what a dug-out is like." You are always asking me what something or other is "like," which forces upon me the sad conclusion that my letters are not in the least descriptive. But, "Do not shoot the pianist: he is doing his best," and if I had the pen of a readier writer you may be sure I'd use it. Yet the odd thing is, with regard to this particular command for information, I have the pen of a readier writer. You know Taffy Morgan—Billy—of our Company? Well, it seems he's quite a bit of a writer, and occasionally sends things home to his father who, is trying to keep a consecutive narrative of the doings of the Battalion. Now last night, within an hour of getting your letter, I read a thing Taffy showed me that he was sending home, all about a Company Headquarters dug-out in the line:

much more decent than my scribbles. So I've asked him to let me copy some of it, and here it is pat, in answer to your question:

" 'Dug-out' is the only word for it. I don't know who did the christening, but it is, like so many words and phrases adopted without question by Tommy at the front, the one proper, exact, and adequate name for the places we inhabit in the trenches. The particular dug-out I have in mind is a Company Headquarters, situated, like a good many others, in a loop trench, perhaps seventy to a hundred yards long, which curves round at a distance of twenty or thirty yards in rear of the fire-trench. The average depth of this little back-water of a trench is, say, seven feet. It was made by the French before we took over, and is very wide at the top. It has no made parapet, but is just a gaping ditch, its ragged, receding top edges eight or ten feet apart, the lower part, in which one walks, being two to three feet wide. The bottom of this ditch is duck-walked: that is to say, it has wooden gratings six feet long and eighteen inches wide laid along it. Each length of duck-walk is supported at either end by a trestle driven deep down into the mud.

"Here and there at a bend in the trench there

will be a gap of several inches between duck-walks. Again one finds a place where one or two slats have been broken. These are cheerless pitfalls on a dark night, in which it is easy to sink one leg in mud or water over the knee. In places a duck-walk has canted over by losing its bearings on the trestle at one corner, giving the whole a treacherous list to one side or the other, simple enough to negotiate by day, but unpleasant for anyone hurrying along at night. Still, the trench is 'ducked' and, so far, luxurious, and a vast improvement on the sort of trench (common over the way among the Boches, I believe) in which men lose their boots, and have to be dug out themselves.

"It happens that my picture of this Company Headquarters dug-out is a three o'clock in the morning picture: moonless, and the deadest hour of the night, when Brother Boche is pretty generally silent, save for a mechanical sort of dropping rifle fire: a fire which one knows somehow, from its sound, means nothing, unless perhaps it means a certain number of German sentries sleepily proving to themselves that they are awake. In the same desultory fashion, Boche, nearly two hundred yards away across the wire entanglements and the centre strip of No Man's Land,

sends up a flare of parachute light every few minutes, which, for half a minute, fills our black ditch with a queer, ghostly sort of radiance, making its dank and jagged sides to gleam again, and drawing curses from anyone feeling his way along it, even as motor lights in a country lane at home make a pedestrian curse on a dark night.

"As one gropes along this ditch one comes to narrow gaps here and there in the side farthest from the enemy. These lead to all kinds of odd necessary places: the homes of signallers, runners, and others, refuse pits, bomb and trench stores, and so on. Presently a thin streak of light shows like a white string in the blackness. This is one of the gaps, about four feet high and eighteen inches wide. A dripping waterproof sheet hangs as a curtain over this gap: the white string is the light from within escaping down one side of the sheet. Lift the sheet to one side, take two steps down and forward—the sheet dripping on your neck the while—and you are in the Company Headquarters dug-out: a hole dug out of the back of the ditch, its floor two feet below the level of the duck-boards outside, its internal dimensions ten feet by eight by six.

"At the back of this little cave, facing you as

you enter—and unless you go warily you are apt to enter with a rush, landing on the earthen floor in a sitting position, what with the wet slime on your gum boots and the steps—are two bunks, one above the other, each two feet wide and made of wire netting stretched on rough stakes fastened to stout poles and covered more or less by a few empty sand-bags. One of these is the bunk of the O.C. Company, used alternatively by one of his subalterns. In the other, a Platoon Commander lies now asleep, one gum-booted leg, mud-caked well above the knee, dangling over the front edge, a goatskin coat over his shoulders, his cap jammed hard down over his eyes to shut out the light of the candle which, stayed firmly to the newspaper tablecloth by a small island of its own grease, burns as cheerily as it can in this rather draughty spot, sheltered a little from the entrance by a screen consisting of a few tins half full of condensed milk, butter, sugar, and the like. The officer in the bunk is sleeping as though dead, and the candle-light catching the mud-flecked stubble on his chin suggests that his turn in the trenches should be at least half over. Another few days should bring him to billets and shaving water."

(Here, then, in addition to the description of a dug-out, you have a portrait of your "Temporary Gentleman," rather unmercifully touched in, I thought!)

"The table—say, 30 inches by 20 inches—was made from a packing-case, and is perched on rough stake legs against the earthen side of the dug-out, with a shelf over it which was formerly a case holding two jars of rum. On the shelf are foodstuffs, Very lights, a couple of rockets, a knobkerrie, a copy of *Punch*, a shortbread tin full of candles, a map, an automatic pistol, and, most curiously, a dust-encrusted French cookery-book, which has taken on the qualities of an antique, and become a kind of landlord's fixture among 'trench stores' in the eyes of the ever-changing succession of company commanders who have 'taken over,' week in and week out, since the French occupation in '14.

"Hung about the sides of the dug-out are half-empty canvas packs or valises, field-glasses, a couple of periscopes, a Very pistol, two sticks caked all over with dry mud, an oilskin coat or two similarly varnished over with the all-pervading mud of the trench, a steel helmet, a couple of pairs of field boots and half a dozen pictures from illus-

trated papers, including one clever drawing of a grinning cat, having under it the legend, 'Smile, damn you!' The field boots are there, and not in use, because the weather is of the prevalent sort, wet, and the tenants of the place are living in what the returns call 'boots, trench, gum, thigh.' Overhead is stretched across the low roof tarred felt. Above that are rough-hewn logs, then galvanised iron and stones and earth: not shell-proof, really, but bullet- and splinter-proof, and for the most part weather-proof—at least as much so as the average coat sold under that description.

"The trench outside is very still just now, but inside the dug-out there is plenty of movement. All round about it, and above and below, the place is honeycombed by rats—brown rats with whitish bellies, big as young cats, heavy with good living; blundering, happy-go-lucky, fearless brutes, who do not bother to hunt the infinitely nimbler mice who at this moment are delicately investigating the tins of foodstuffs within a few inches of the head of the O.C. Company. The rats are variously occupied: as to a couple of them, matrons, in opposite corners of the roof, very obviously in suckling their young, who feed with awful zest; as to half a dozen others, in courting, during which

process they keep up a curious kind of crooning, chirruping song wearisome to human ears; and as to the numerous remainder, in conducting a cross-country steeplechase of sorts, to and fro and round and round on the top side of the roofing felt, which their heavy bodies cause to bulge and sag till one fancies it must give way.

"There is a rough rickety stool beside the table. On this is seated the O.C. Company, his arms outspread on the little ledge of a table, his head on his arms, his face resting on the pages of an open Army Book 153, in which, half an hour ago, he wrote his morning situation report, in order that his signallers might inform Battalion Headquarters, nearly a mile away down the communication trench to the rear, with sundry details, that there was nothing doing beyond the normal intermittent strafing of a quiet night. The O.C. Company is asleep. A mouse is clearing its whiskers of condensed milk within two inches of his left ear, and the candle is guttering within two inches of his cap-peak. During the past few days he has had four or five such sleeps as this, half an hour or so at a time, and no more, for there has been work toward in the line, involving exposure for men on the parapet and so forth, of a sort which

does not make for restfulness among O.C. Companies.

"There comes a quiet sound of footfalls on the greasy duck-boards outside. Two mice on the table sit bolt upright to listen. The cross-country meeting overhead is temporarily suspended. The O.C. Company's oilskin-covered shoulders twitch nervously. The mother rats continue noisily suckling their young, though one warily pokes its sharp nose out over the edge of the felt, sniffing inquiringly. Then the waterproof sheet is drawn aside, and the O.C. Company sits up with a jerk. A signaller on whose leather jerkin the raindrops glisten in the flickering candle-light thrusts head and shoulders into the dug-out.

" 'Message from the Adjutant, sir!'

"The O.C. reads the two-line message, initials the top copy for return to the signaller, spikes the carbon copy on a nail overhead, where many others hang, glances at his wrist-watch, and says wearily:

" 'Well, what are the signallers strafing about, anyhow? It's ten minutes before time now. Here you are!'

"He tears two written pages from the Army message book which was his pillow, signs them, and hands them up to the signaller.

" 'Call the Sergeant-Major on your way back, and tell him I've gone down to the sap-head. He can bring the wiring party along right away. It's nearly three o'clock. Send a runner to tell the officer on duty I'm going out myself with this party. You might just remind the Sergeant-Major I want two stretcher-bearers at the sap-head. Tell 'em to keep out of sight till the others are out over the parapet. Right! Messages will go to Mr. ——, of course, while I'm out.'

"Brother Boche may remain quiet. Three o'clock is a good quiet time. And there is no moon. But, Brother Boche being dead quiet just now, may conceivably have patrols out there in No Man's Land. They may carry valuable information quickly to his line, and two or three machine-guns may presently open up on the O.C. Company and his wiring party, who, again, may be exposed by means of flare lights from the other side. One hopes not. Meanwhile, after a glance round, the O.C. picks up his mud-caked leather mitts, settles the revolver pouch on his belt, blows out the guttering candle, feels his way out past the dripping waterproof sheet into the black trench, and leaves the dug-out to his sleeping

brother officer (who was on deck from 10 to 1, and will be out again an hour before dawn) and the rats.

"Theoretically, this O.C. Company may be himself as much in need of sleep as anyone in the trench. Actually, however, apart from his needs, he is personally responsible for whatever may happen in quite a long stretch of dark, mysterious trench: of trench which in one moment may be converted by the ingenious Boche into a raging hell of paralysing gas and smoke, of lurid flame and rending explosion. German officers seated in artillery dug-outs a mile or so away across the far side of No Man's Land may bring about that transformation in one moment. They did it less than a week ago, though, by reason of unceasing watchfulness on this side, it availed them nothing. They may be just about to do it now, and, unlike the average of German O.C. Companies, our officers never ask their men to face any kind of danger which they themselves do not face with them. And so, for this particular O.C. Company, the interior of that queer little dug-out (where the men's rum stands in jars under the lower bunk, and letters from home are scanned, maps pored over, and reports and returns made out) does not

exactly bring unmixed repose. But the rats love it."

So there you are! By the judicious picking of Taffy's brains I have been enabled to present you with a much better picture of a dug-out than my own unaided pen could give. Reading over, there seems something melancholy and sombre about it; I don't know why. It's a jolly little dug-out, and Taffy's a thundering fine officer; nothing in the least melancholy about him. Then why—? Oh, well, I guess it's his Celtic blood. Maybe he's got a temperament. I must tell him so. By the way, that wiring job he mentions came off all right; a nasty exposed place, but "the Peacemaker" got his party through without a single casualty, or, as the men always say, "Casu*al*ity."

Taffy writes a much better letter, doesn't he? than your

"*Temporary Gentleman.*"

A BOMBING SHOW

VERY many thanks for the parcel with the horse-hide mitts and the torch refills, both of which will be greatly appreciated. The mitts are the best things of the kind I've seen for trench work, and as for electric torches, I don't know what we should do without them.

I've come below for a sleep, really. Taffy Morgan was very much off colour yesterday, and is far from fit to-day. I had to take his duty as well as my own last night, so came off pretty short in the matter of rest. But I must stop to tell you about the lark we had last night; the jolliest thing that's happened since we came in, and no end of a score for "A" Company. My batman tells me "B" are mad as hatters about it.

Our signalling officer happened to be along the front yesterday afternoon with a brand-new telescope that someone had sent the C.O., a very fine instrument. Signals wasn't interested in our bit of line, as it happens, but was dead nuts

on some new Boche machine-gun emplacement or other away on "B's" left. When he was coming back through our line I got him to lend me the new glass while he had some tea and wrote reports in our dug-out. Perhaps you think there's not much need of a telescope when the Boche line is less than a couple of hundred yards away. Well, now you'd hardly believe how difficult it is to make things out. At this time of the year the whole of this place is full of mist, for one thing. And then, you see, the ground in front is studded all over with barbed wire, stakes, long rank grass, things thrown out: here and there an old log, and, here and there, of course, a dead body. One has to look along the ground level, since to look from a higher level would mean exposure, and I can assure you it's surprisingly easy to miss things. I've wasted a good many rounds myself, firing at old rags or bits of wood, or an old cape in the grass among the Boche wire, feeling sure I'd got a sniper. The ground is pretty much torn up, too, you understand, by shells and stuff, and that makes it more difficult.

Well, I was looking out from a little sheltered spot alongside the entrance to what we call Stinking Sap. It has rather a rottener smell than

most trenches, I think. And all of a sudden I twigged something that waked me right up. It was nothing much: just a shovel sticking up against a little mound. But it led to other things. A yard away from where this shovel lay the C.O.'s fine glass enabled me to make out a gap in the wet, misty grass. You may be sure I stared jolly hard, and presently the whole thing became clear to me. The Boches had run out a new sap to fully sixty yards from their fire trench, which at this particular point is rather far from ours: over 250 yards, I suppose. It was right opposite our own Stinking Sap, and I suppose the head of it was not more than 100 yards from the head of Stinking Sap. There was no Boche working there then; not a sign of any movement. I made sure of that. Then I got my compass and trench map, and took a very careful bearing. And then I toddled round to Company Headquarters and got hold of "the Peacemaker," without letting Signals know anything about it. If the O.C. liked to let Battalion Headquarters know, that was his business.

Of course, "the Peacemaker" was delighted. "It's perfectly clear they must have cut it last night," he said. "And as sure as God made little

apples, they'll be going on with it to-night. Let's see, the moon rises about 9.45. Splendid! They'll get to work as soon as it's dark."

He was awfully decent about it, and agreed to let me go, since I'd had the luck to spot it. As a matter of fact, he did the more important spotting himself. He twigged what I'd overlooked: a whacking big shell-hole, shallow but wide, about fifteen or twenty feet to one side of their sap-head; an absolutely ideal spot for cover, and no more than a hundred yards from the head of Stinking Sap. I decided to take Corporal Slade with me, because he's such a fine bomber, besides being as cool as a cucumber and an all-round good chap. You remember he was with me that time in Master Boche's trench. Somehow, the thing got round before tea-time, and the competition among the men was something awful. When Slade gave it out that I was taking all the men I wanted from No. 1 Platoon, there was actually a fight between one of my lot and a fellow named Ramsay, of No. 3 Platoon; a draper, I'll trouble you, and a pillar of his chapel at home. Then a deputation of the other Platoon Sergeants waited on "the Peacemaker," and in the end, to save bloodshed, I agreed to take Corporal Slade and one man

from my own Platoon, and one man from each of the other three Platoons. To call for volunteers for work over the parapet with our lot is perfectly hopeless. You must detail your men, or the whole blessed Company would swarm out over the sticks every time, especially if there's the slightest hint of raiding or bombing.

"The Peacemaker's" idea was that we must reach that shell-hole from the end of Stinking Sap, if possible, before the Boche started work in his new sap, because once he started he'd be sure to have a particularly sharp look-out kept, and might very well have a covering party outside as well. Before it was dark my fellows were champing their bits in Stinking Sap, fretting to be off. If one gave the beggars half a chance they'd be out in the open in broad daylight. But, of course, I kept 'em back. There was no reason why Boche should be in a violent hurry to start work, and I was most anxious he shouldn't suspect that we suspected anything.

As it turned out, we were all lying in that shell-hole close to his new sap for three-quarters of an hour before a single Boche made a move. There was a fine rain all the time, and it was pitch dark. The only thing we didn't like was the fact that

all the flares and parachute lights ever made seemed to be being sent up from the Boche line, right alongside this new sap. However, we lay perfectly still and flat, hands covered and faces down, and as long as you do that all the flares in the world won't give you away much, in ground as full of oddments and unevenness as that is.

By and by Slade gave a little tug at my jerkin. I listened hard, and just made out footsteps, probably in the Boche fire trench itself, near the entrance to their new sap. Two or three minutes later we began really to enjoy ourselves. As far as we could make out Fritz hadn't a notion that we were on to his game. Six or eight of 'em came shuffling along the sap, carrying picks and shovels, and jabbering and growling away nineteen to the dozen. We could hear every sound. One fellow, anyhow, was smoking. We got the whiff of that. We could hear 'em spit, and, very nearly, we could hear them breathe. I did wish I knew a little more German than "Donnerwetter" and "Sprechen Sie Deutsch?"

I could feel the man on my left (the draper from No. 3) quivering like a coursing greyhound in a leash, and had to whisper to him to wait for the word. But Corporal Slade on my right might

have been on the barrack square. I saw him use a match to pick his teeth while he listened. I'd rehearsed my fellows letter perfect in our own trench before we started, and when the Boches were fairly under way digging, I gave the signal with my left hand. There was a bomb in my right. Waiting for it as I was, I could distinctly hear the safety-pins come out of our six bombs, and could even hear the breathed murmur of the pugnacious draper at my shoulder:

"A hundred an' one, a hundred an' two, a hundred an' three!" (He was timing the fuse of his bomb, exactly as I'd told 'em.)

And then we tore a big hole in the night. Our six bombs landed, one on the edge and the other five plumb in the sap-head before us, right in the middle of the six or eight Boches digging there. Two seconds after they left our hands they did their job. It was less than two seconds really. And when the rending row was done we heard only one Boche moaning, so I knew that at least six or seven were "gone West" for keeps, and would strafe no more Englishmen.

Now the idea had been that directly our job was done we should bolt for the head of Stinking Sap. But, while we'd been lying there, it had occurred

to me that the Boches, knowing all about what distance bombs could be thrown, and that we must be lying in the open near their sap-head, ought to be able to sweep that ground with machine-gun fire before we could get to Stinking Sap, and that, having done that, they would surely send a whole lot more men down their new sap, to tackle what was left of us that way. Therefore I'd made each of my fellows carry four bombs in his pockets: twenty-four among the lot of us. And we'd only used six. Quite enough, too, for the Boches in that sap. Therefore, again, we now lay absolutely still, and just as close as wax, while Fritz rained parachute lights, stars, flares, and every kind of firework in the sky, and, just as I had fancied, swept his sap-head with at least a thousand rounds of machine-gun bullets, not one of which so much as grazed us, where we lay spread-eagled in the mud of that shell-hole.

And then—dead silence.

"Get your bombs ready, lads," I told my fellows. In another few seconds we heard the Boches streaming along their narrow new sap. They took it for granted we had cleared back to our line, and they made no attempt to disguise their coming. In fact, from the rate at which

they rushed along that narrow ditch I could almost swear that some came without rifles or anything. We waited till the near end of the sap was full, and then: "A hundred and one," etc. We gave 'em our second volley, and immediately on top of it our third. It must have been a regular shambles. Slade and I, by previous arrangement, lobbed ours over as far as ever we could to the left, landing quite near the beginning of the sap, and so getting the Boches who were only just leaving their own fire trench. Then I laid my hand on the draper to prevent his throwing, and Slade and the other three gave their last volley, and bolted full pelt for Stinking Sap

There was no bucking at all in the part of the sap near us. The Boches there wouldn't trouble anyone any more, I fancy. But a few seconds after Slade disappeared, we heard a fresh lot start on their way down the sap from their fire trench. We gave 'em up to about "A hundred and three" and a half, and then we let 'em have our last two bombs, well to the left, and ourselves made tracks like greased lightning for Stinking Sap. The luck held perfectly, and Slade was hauling the draper in over the parapet of Stinking Sap before a sound came from the Boches' machine-

guns. And then, by Gad! they opened on us. They holed my oilskin coat for me, as I slid in after Ramsay, and spoiled it. I've jotted it down against 'em and in due course they shall pay. But not one of my crowd got a scratch, and we reckon to have accounted for at the very least twenty Boches, maybe double that—a most splendid lark.

What makes "B" Company rather mad is that, strictly speaking, this new Boche sap is a shade nearer their line than ours. The C.O. came up to look at it this morning, on the strength of our O.C.'s morning situation report, and was most awfully nice to me about it. He said we did well to wait for the Boches' coming down from their line after our first scoop, and that plans must be made to fit circumstances, and not held to be ends in themselves, and all that kind of thing—initiative, you know, and so on—very nice indeed he was. And the best of it is our artillery has registered on that sap this morning, and this afternoon is just about going to blow it across the Rhine. So altogether "A" Company is feeling pretty good, if you please, and has its tail well up. So has your

"Temporary Gentleman."

OVER THE PARAPET

We are back again in billets, but so close to the line this time that it's more like being in support trenches. That is to say, one hears all the firing, and knows just what is happening in the line all the time. Also, we do carrying fatigues in the trenches at night. Still, it's billets, and not bad. One can get a bath, and one can sleep dry. I must tell you about billets sometime. At the moment the letter from you lying in front of me contains clear orders. I am to tell you what patrolling is—quite a big order.

Well, there are many different kinds of patrols, you know, but so far as we are concerned, here in trenches, they boil down to two sorts: observation patrols and fighting patrols, such as bombing and raiding parties. It's all night work, of course, since one cannot do anything over the parapet by day without getting shot; anything, that is, except a regular attack preceded by bombardment of the Boche lines. On the whole, I think it's

about the most interesting part of our work, and I think it's safe to say it's a part in which our fellows can run rings round the Boches. In masses (well primed with rum; ether and oxygen, too, they say) the Boche can do great things. He will advance, as it were blindly, in the face of any kind of fire you like; even the kind that accounts for sixty or seventy per cent. of him in a hundred yards. But when he comes to act as an individual, or in little groups, as in patrolling—well, we don't think much of him. We think our worst is better than his best in all that sort of work. I'm perfectly certain that, man for man, the British and French troops are more formidable, harder to beat, better men all round, than the Boche.

The first kind of patrol I mentioned—observation—is part and parcel of our everyday routine in the firing line. This kind goes out every night, and often several times during the night, from every Company. Its main objective is observation: to get any information it can about the doings of the Hun, and to guard our line against surprise moves of any sort. But, though that's its main object, it does not go unarmed, of course, and, naturally, will not refuse a scrap if the chance comes. But it differs from a bombing or raiding

patrol in that it does not go out for the purpose of fighting, and as a rule is not strong, numerically; usually not more than about half a dozen in the party. In some Companies observation patrols are often sent out under a good N.C.O. and no officer. We make a point of sending an officer always; not that we can't trust our N.C.O.'s; they're all right; but we talked it over, and decided we would rather one of us always went. As I said, it's interesting work, and work with possibilities of distinction in it, and we're all pretty keen on it. Every Company in the Battalion is. (Boche patrols, one gathers, hardly ever include an officer.)

With us, it is decided during the afternoon just what we are going to do that night in the patrol line, and the officer whose turn it is chooses his own men and N.C.O.'s. And within limits, you know, "the Peacemaker" lets us work out our own plans pretty much as we like, providing there's no special thing he wants done. It often happens, you see, that during daylight the sentries or the officer on duty have been able to make out with glasses some signs of work being done at night by the Boche, in his front line, or in a sap or a communication trench. Then that night it will

be the job of the patrols to investigate that part of the opposite line very carefully. Perhaps half a dozen Boches will be found working somewhere where our patrol can wipe 'em out by lobbing a few bombs among 'em. That's a bit of real jam for the patrol. Or, again, they may observe something quite big: fifty to a hundred Boches carrying material and building an emplacement, or something of that kind. Then it will be worth while to get back quickly, having got an exact bearing on the spot, and warn the O.C. Company. He may choose to turn a couple of machine-guns loose suddenly on that spot, or he may find it better to telephone to Battalion Headquarters and let them know about it, so that, if they like, they can get our "heavies" turned on, and liven the Boche job up with a good shower of H.E., to smash the work, after a few rounds of shrap. to lay out the workers.

Then, again, if you all keep your eyes jolly well skinned, there's a sporting chance of getting another kind of luck. You may spot a Boche patrol while you're crawling about in No Man's Land. "B" Company had the luck to do that three nights ago, and our fellows are so envious now they all want to be patrolling at once; it's

as much as one can do to keep them in the trench. They're simply aching to catch a Boche patrol out, and put the wind up "B." You see "B" lost two out of a Boche patrol of six; killing three and taking one prisoner. "A" can't say anything about it, of course, because we've not had the luck yet to see a Boche patrol. But God help its members when we do, for I assure you our fellows would rather die half a dozen times over than fail to wipe "B's" eye. It's the way they happen to be built. They don't wish the Boche any particular harm, but if they can get within sight of a Boche patrol, that patrol has just got to be scuppered without any possible chance of a couple getting clear. The performance of "B" has just got to be beaten, and soon.

Honestly, it isn't easy to hold these chaps back. The observation patrol I was out with the night before we came out of the trenches really needed holding. There were no Boche patrols for them to scupper, and just to humour the beggars I kept 'em out nearly an hour longer than I had any right to; and then, if you'll believe me, they were so disappointed at having to head back with nothing in the bag, so to say, that the Corporal was deputed to beg my permission for a little raid on the

Huns' front trench. And there were just five of us, all told; our only weapons knobkerries and two bombs each, and my revolver and dagger.

By the way, the survivor of the Hun patrol that "B" rounded up was not the first prisoner taken by the Battalion. No; we had that honour nearly a week ago. A queer episode that, on our second night in. There was a bit of line on our extreme right which was neither for use nor ornament; a horrible place. It had been all blown in by trench mortars and oil-cans, and hardly had a strand of unbroken wire in front of it. (You may be sure it's in different shape now. We worked at it for two nights in succession, and made a good job of it.) Well, it was so bad for fifty yards or so that sentries could not occupy it properly; no fire-step left, and no cover worth speaking of. Taffy Morgan was nosing about in front of this bit just after dark, out beyond where the wire had been, marking places for new entanglements, when he spotted a big Boche patrol making slowly up that way from their front. They were fifteen or twenty strong.

Taffy lay very low, and crawled back into our line without being seen. Then he raced down the trench for his pet machine-gun—a Lewis, you know

—and got it along there with a Corporal and a couple of machine-gunners in rather less than no time. By then the messenger he had sent off had got back with "the Peacemaker" and myself and the Sergeant-Major. We all kept as quiet as mice till we were able to make out the movement of the Boche patrol. We let them get fairly close—thirty or forty yards—and then let blaze at 'em, firing just as low as we could.

I suppose we gave 'em about four hundred rounds. We heard a bit of moaning after "the Peacemaker" gave the word to cease fire, and then, to our amazement, a Hun talking, apparently to another Boche, telling him to come on, and calling him some kind of a bad hat. I tell you, it was queer to listen to. The Boche who was doing the talking appeared to have worked a good bit down to the left of the bunch we had fired at, and had evidently got into our wire. We could hear him floundering among the tin cans.

"Don't fire," said "the Peacemaker." "We'll maybe get this chap alive." And, sure enough, the Boche began singing out to us now, asking first of all whether we were Prussian, and then trying a few phrases in French, including a continuously repeated: "Je suis fatigué!"

Most extraordinary it was. "The Peacemaker" couldn't tell him we were Prussian, but he kept inviting the fellow to come in, and telling him we wouldn't hurt him. Finally I took a man out and lugged the chap in out of the wire myself. We got tired of his floundering, and I guess he must have been tired of it too, for he was pretty badly cut by it. He had no rifle; nothing but a dagger; and the moment I got him into our trench he began catting all over the place; most deadly sick he was.

We led him off down the trench to the S.M.'s dug-out and gave him a drink of tea, and washed the wire cuts on his face and hands. He was a poor starveling-looking kind of a chap; a bank clerk from Heidelberg, as it turned out afterwards, and a Corporal. He told us he'd had nothing but rum, but we thought him under the influence of some drug; some more potent form of Dutch courage, such as the Huns use before leaving their trenches. Our M.O. told us afterwards he was very poorly nourished. We blindfolded him and took him down to Battalion Headquarters, and from there he would be sent on to the Brigade. We never knew if they got any useful information out of him; but he was the Battalion's first

prisoner. The other Boches we got in that night were dead. That burst of M.G. fire had laid them out pretty thoroughly, nine of 'em; and a small patrol we kept out there wounded three or four more who came much later—I suppose to look for their own wounded.

There's a creepy kind of excitement about patrol work which makes it fascinating. If there's any light at all, you never know who's drawing a bead on you. If there's no light, you never know what you're going to bump into at the next step. It's very largely hands-and-knees' work, and our chaps just revel in it. My first, as you know, landed me in the Boche trenches; and that's by no means a very uncommon thing either, though it ought never to happen if you have a good luminous-faced compass and the sense to refer to it often enough. My second patrol was a bit more successful. I'll tell you about that next time. Meanwhile, I hope what I've said will make you fancy you know roughly what patrol work is, though, to be sure, I feel I haven't given you the real thing the way Taffy could if he set out to write about it. He could write it almost better perhaps than he could do it. He's a wee bit too jerky and impulsive, too much strung

up rather, for patrol work. My thick-headed sort of plodding is all right on patrol; suits the men first-rate. I suppose it kind of checks the excitement and keeps it within bounds. But you mark my words, our fellows will get a Boche patrol before long, and when they do I'll wager they won't lose any of 'em.

We're going to play a team of "B" Company at football to-morrow afternoon, if the Boche doesn't happen to be running an artillery strafe. We play alongside the cemetery, and for some unknown reason the Boche gunners seem to be everlastingly ranging on it, as though they wanted to keep our dead from resting. We're all as fit and jolly as can be, especially your

"*Temporary Gentleman.*"

THE NIGHT PATROL

HERE in billets the amount of letter-writing the men do is something appalling—for the officers who have to censor their letters. As you know, our training in England included some time in four different parts of the country, and our fellows have sweethearts in each place. And they seem to get parcels from most of 'em, too. Then there are the home letters. They all describe their writers as being "in the pink," and getting on "champion," as, I believe, I told you before.

My billet—or, rather, our billet, for all "A" Company officers are under the one roof here—is in the church house, and there's a candlestick three feet high in the bedroom I share with Taffy. There's no glass in the windows, and the roof at one end has had a shell through it, and so the room gets a bit swampy. Otherwise, the place is all right. Our own batteries near by shake it up at times, and the shell-holes, in the road outside show it's had some very narrow squeaks; but

neither it nor the church has suffered very much, though they stand well up on a hill, less than half a mile from our support line of trenches, which the Battalion billeted here mans in event of alarm —gas attack, you know, or anything of that sort. So while we're here we sleep fully equipped at night. But in our next week out, at the village farther back, we are more luxurious, and undress of a night.

But I promised to tell you about that second patrol of mine. We were greatly interested in some kind of an erection we could see just behind the Boche front line on our left. All we could see was sand-bags; but, somehow, it looked too big and massive for a mere machine-gun emplacement, and we were all most anxious to find out what it could be. So "the Peacemaker" agreed that I should take a patrol that night and try to investigate. This was the first patrol we sent out as a Company in the line on our own. My first was when we were in with another Company for instruction, you know, and they apparently had not noticed this sand-bag structure. At all events, they made no report to "the Peacemaker" about it when we took over.

The moon was not due to rise till about eleven

that night, so I decided to go out at nine. The Company Sergeant-Major asked if he could come, so I arranged to take him and one Platoon scout from each Platoon. They had none of them been out as yet, and we wanted them to have practice. Getting out into No Man's Land marks a distinct epoch in a man's training for trench warfare, you know. If it happens that he has some considerable time in trenches without ever going over the parapet, he's apt to be jumpy when he does get out. I fancy that must be one reason why the Boches make such a poor show in the matter of individual effort of an aggressive sort. They're so trench-bound that their men seem no use out of trenches, except in massed formation.

Don't make any mistake about it; there's some excuse for a man being jumpy over the parapet when he's never had a chance of getting accustomed to it. That's why I think our O.C. is very wise in the way he tries to give all the men a turn at work over the parapet, wiring, patrolling, improving saps, and what not: because it's a pretty eerie business until you get used to it. Behind our line you have graves and crosses, and comparatively friendly things of all kinds—rubbish, you know, and oddments discarded by fellow

humans no longer ago than a matter of hours. But out in No Man's Land, of course, the dominant factor is the swift, death-dealing bullet, and the endless mass of barbed-wire entanglements which divides Boches from Britons and Frenchmen for so many hundreds of miles. There are plenty of dead things out there, but, barring the rats, when you get any other movement in No Man's Land you may reckon it's enemy movement: creeping men with bombs and daggers, who may have been stalking you or may not have seen you. But it wouldn't do to reckon much on anyone's not having seen you, because if there's one place in the world in which every man's ears and eyes are apt to be jolly well open it's out there in the slimy darkness of No Man's Land.

You may very well chance to stick your hand in the upturned face of a far-gone corpse, as I did my first time out; but if you do so you mustn't shiver—far less grunt—because shivering may make your oilskin coat or something else rustle, and draw fire on you and your party. So a man needs to have his wits about him when he's over the parapet, and the cooler he keeps and the more deliberate are his movements the better for

all concerned. One needn't loaf, but, on the other hand, it's rather fatal to hurry, and quite fatal to flurry, especially when you're crawling among wire with loose strands of it and "giant gooseberries" of the prickly stuff lying round in all directions on the ground to catch your hands and knees and hold you up. If you lose your head or do anything to attract attention, your number's pretty well up. But, on the other hand, if you keep perfectly cool and steady, making no sound whatever happens, and lying perfectly flat and still while Boche flares are up or their machine-guns are trying to locate you, it's surprising how very difficult it is for the Hun to get you, and what an excellent chance you have of returning to your own line with a whole skin.

I had an exact compass bearing on the spot we wanted to investigate, taken from the sap on our left from which we were starting. "The Peacemaker" ran his own hands over the men of the party before we climbed out, to make sure everyone had remembered to leave all papers and things of that sort behind. (One goes pretty well stripped for these jobs, to avoid anything useful falling perchance into Boche hands.) We each carried a couple of bombs, the men had knobkerries, and

I had revolver and dagger, to be on the safe side. But we were out for information, not scrapping.

It was beautifully dark, and, starting from a sap-head, clear of our own wire, we crossed the open very quickly, hardly so much as stooping, till we were close to the Boche wire, when a burst of machine-gun fire from them sent us to ground. The Companies on each flank in our line had been warned we were out. This is always done to prevent our own men firing at us. Such little fire as was coming from our line was high, and destined for the Boche support lines and communications; nothing to hurt us.

Now, when we began crawling through the Boche wire I made the sort of mistake one does make until experience teaches. I occupied myself far too much with what was under my nose, and too little with what lay ahead—and too little with my compass. To be sure, there's a good deal in the Boche wire which rather forces itself upon the attention of a man creeping through it on hands and knees. The gooseberries and loose strands are the devil. Still, it is essential to keep an eye on the compass, and to look ahead, as well as on the ground under one's nose, lest you over-

shoot your mark or drop off diagonally to one side or the other of it. I know a good deal better now. But one has no business to make even one mistake, if one's a "Temporary Officer and Gentleman," because one's men have been taught to follow and trust one absolutely, and it's hardly ever only one's own safety that's at stake.

Suddenly I ran my face against the side of a "giant gooseberry" with peculiarly virulent prongs, and in that moment a bullet whizzed low over my head, and—here's the point—the bolt of the rifle from which that bullet came was pulled back and jammed home for the next shot—as it seemed right in my ear. We all lay perfectly flat and still. I could feel the Sergeant-Major's elbow just touching my left hip. Very slowly and quietly I raised my head enough to look round the side of that "giant gooseberry," and instinct made me look over my right shoulder.

We were less than ten paces from the Boche parapet. The great, jagged black parados, like a mountain range on a theatre drop scene, hung right over my shoulder against a sky which seemed now to have a most deadly amount of light in it. I was lying almost in a line with it, instead of at right angles to it. Just then, the sentry who had

fired gave a little cough to clear his throat. It seemed he was actually with us. Then he fired again. I wondered if he had a bead on the back of my head. He was not directly opposite us, but a dozen paces or so along the line.

Now, by the queer twisty feeling that went down my spine when my eyes first lighted on that grim black line of parados just over my shoulder, I guessed how my men might be feeling. "Little blame to them if they show some panic," thinks I. I turned my face left, so as to look down at the Sergeant-Major's over my left shoulder. He'd seen that towering parados against the sky, and heard that sentry's cough and the jamming home of his rifle bolt. By twisting my head I brought my face close to the S.M.'s, and could see that he fancied himself looking right into his own end. I had to think quick. I know that man's mind like the palm of my hand, and I now know his splendid type: the English ex-N.C.O. of Marines, with later service in the Metropolitan Police—a magnificent blend. I also know the wonderful strength of his influence over the men, to whom he is experienced military professionalism, expertness incarnate. At present he felt we had come upon disaster.

"My Gawd, sir!" he breathed at me. "Why, we're on top of 'em!"

That was where I thought quick, and did a broad grin as I whispered to him: "Pretty good for a start—a damn fine place, Sergeant-Major. But we'll manage to get a bit nearer before we leave 'em, won't we?"

It worked like a charm, and I thanked God for the fine type he represents. It was as though his mind was all lighted up, and I could see the thoughts at work in it. "Oh, come! so it's all right, after all. My officer's quite pleased. He knew all about it and it's just what he wanted; so that's all right." These were the thoughts. And from that moment the S.M. began to regard the whole thing as a rather creditable lark, though the pit of his stomach had felt queer, as well it might, for a moment. And the wonderful thing was—there must be something in telepathy, you know—that this change seemed to communicate itself almost instantly to the men—bless their simple souls!—crouched round about behind. I'd no time to think of the grimness of it, after that. A kind of heat seemed to spread all over me from inside, and I had been cold. I think a mother must feel like that when danger threatens her

kiddies. The thought in my mind was: "I've brought these fellows here in carelessness. I'll get 'em back with whole skins or I'll die at it."

I never had any Hymn of Hate feeling in my life, but I think I'd have torn half a dozen Boches in pieces with my hands before I'd have let 'em get at any of those chaps of mine that night.

Now I was free; I knew the men were all right. I whispered to the S.M., and very slowly and silently we began to back away from that grim parados. The sentry must have been half asleep, I fancy. My compass showed me we must be forty or fifty yards left of the point in the Boche line we wanted; so as soon as we were far enough back we worked slowly up right, and then a bit in again. And then we found all we'd hoped for. It was a regular redoubt the Boche was building, and he had nearly a hundred men at work, including the long string we saw carrying planks and posts. Some were just sitting round smoking. We could hear every word spoken, almost every breath. And we could see there were sixty or seventy men immediately round the redoubt.

That was good enough for me. All I wanted now was to get my men back safely. I knew "the Peacemaker" had two machine-guns trained

precisely on the redoubt. All I wanted was to make sure their fire was all a shade to the left, and every bullet would tell. We should be firing fairly into the brown of 'em; because the little cross communication trench which we had watched them working in was no more than waist-deep; just a short-cut for convenience in night work only. We had 'em absolutely cold. The S.M. told me the men wanted to bomb 'em from where we were. But that was not my game at all.

With the compass bearing I had, getting back was simple. I saw the last man into our sap, and found the O.C. waiting there for me. I'd no sooner given him my news than he was at the guns. We had twenty or thirty rifles levelled on the same mark, too, and, at "the Peacemaker's" signal, they all spoke at once. Gad! it was fine to see the fire spouting from the M.G.'s mouth, and to know how its thunder must be telling.

Four belts we gave 'em altogether, and then whipped the guns down into cover, just as the Boche machine-guns began to answer from all along their line. It was a "great do," as the S.M. said. The men were wildly delighted. They had seen the target; lain and watched it, under orders not to make a sound. And now

the pressure was off. Listening now, the Boche guns having ceased fire, our sentries could plainly hear groaning and moaning opposite, and see the lights reflected on the Boche parados moving to and fro as their stretcher-bearers went about their work. A "great do," indeed. And so says your

"*Temporary Gentleman.*"

IN BILLETS

You have asked me once or twice about billets, and I ought to have told you more about them before; only there seems such a lot to pick and choose from that when I do sit down to write I seldom get on to the particular story I mean to tell.

And that reminds me, I didn't tell you of the odd thing that happened the night we came out into billets this time. The Boche had finished his customary evening Hymn of Hate, or we thought he had, and while the men were filing into their different billets the C.S.M. proceeded to post our Company guard outside Company Headquarters. He had just given the sentry his instructions and turned away, when Boche broke out in a fresh place—their battery commander's evening sauerkraut had disagreed with him, or something—and half a dozen shells came whistling over the village in quick succession. One landed in the roadway, a yard and a half

in front of the newly-posted sentry. Had it been a sound shell, it would have "sent him West"; but it proved a dud, and merely dug itself a neat hole in the macadam and lay there like a little man, having first sent a spray of mud and a few bits of flint spurting over our sentry and rattling against his box.

Now that sentry happened to be our friend Tommy Dodd; and Tommy was about tired out. He'd been on a wiring party over the parapet three parts of the night, taken his turn of sentry-go in the other part; and all day long had been digging and mud-scooping, like the little hero he is, to finish repairing an impassable bit of trench that master Boche had blown in the evening before, to make it safe before we handed over to the Company relieving. He was literally caked in clay from head to foot; eyebrows, moustache, and all; he hadn't a dry stitch on him, and, of course, had not had his supper. It was an oversight that he should have been detailed for first sentry-go on our arrival in billets. I had noticed him marching up from the trenches; he could hardly drag one foot after another. What do you think the shell landing at his feet and showering mud on him extorted from weary

Tommy Dodd? I was standing alongside at the time.

"'Ere, not so much of it, Mister Boche! You take it from me an' be a bit more careful like. Silly blighter! Wotjer playin' at? Didn't yer know I was on sentry? Chuckin' yer silly shells about like that! If yer ain't more careful you'll be dirty'n me nice clean uniform nex', an' gettin' me paraded over for bein' dirty on sentry-go!"

It's a pretty good spirit, isn't it? And I can assure you it runs right through; warranted fast colour; and as for standing the wash—well, Tommy Dodd had been up to his middle in muddy water most of the day. The Kaiser may have a pretty big military organisation, but, believe me, Germany and Austria together don't contain anything strong enough to dull, let alone break the spirit of the men of the New Army. The Army's new enough; but the tradition and the spirit are from the same old bin. It isn't altered; and there's nothing better; not anywhere in the world.

And I'm supposed to be telling you about billets!

Well, I told you before, how we took over from another Company; and the same holds good of how the other Company takes over from us in the

trenches; and when it's over our fellows file out down the long communication trench, by platoons, with a goodish interval between men, so as to minimise the effect of chance bullets and shells; every man carrying all his own mud-caked goods and chattels, and all in good spirits at the prospects of a little change. Nothing Tommy welcomes so much as change—unless it's the chance of a scrap.

We cannot very well form up and march properly directly we get out of trenches at Ambulance Corner, because Fritz is so fond of directing his field-gun practice there; so we rather straggle over the next quarter of a mile, by platoons, till we come to the little river. It's a jolly little stream, with a regular mill-race of a current, and a nice clear shallow reach close to the bridge, with clean grass alongside. We wade right in and wash boots. Everyone is wearing "boots, trench, gum, thigh," so he just steps into the river and washes the mud off. Then he gets back to the bank, and off with the gum-boots and on with the ordinary marching boots, which have been carried slung round the neck by their laces. The trench boots, clean and shiny now, are handed into store at Brigade Headquarters, ready for our next turn

in, for anyone else who wants 'em. In store, they are hung up to dry, you know, for, though no wet from outside will ever leak into these boots (unless they're cut), yet, being water- and air-tight, they get pretty wet inside after a week's turn in trenches, from condensation and the moisture of one's own limbs which has no chance of evaporation. It's the same with the much-vaunted trench-coats, of course; a few hours' wear makes 'em pretty damp inside.

After handing in the boots, we form up properly for marching into the village. Our Company Quartermaster-Sergeant, with a N.C.O. from each platoon, has been ahead a few hours before us, to take over billets from the Q.M.S. of the Company that relieved us; and so each platoon has a guide to meet it, just as in taking over a line of trenches. Either in or close to every billet, there are cellars marked up outside for so many men. These are our bolt-holes, to which every man is instructed to run and take shelter the instant a bombardment begins. "Abri 50 hommes"; or "Cellar for 30 men"; these are the legends you see daubed outside the cellars. And chalked on the gates of the house-yards throughout the village you will see such lines as "30 Men, 'A' Coy.";

or "2 Off.'s, 30 Men, 'B' Coy."; and, perhaps, the initials of the regiment.

But when I mention billets you mustn't think of the style in which you billeted those four recruits last spring, you know. By Jove, no! It is laid down that billets in France mean the provision of shelter from the elements. Sometimes it's complete shelter, and sometimes it isn't; but it's always the best the folk can give. In this village, for instance, there are hardly any inhabitants left. Ninety per cent. of the houses are empty, and a good many have been pretty badly knocked about by shells. I have often laughed in remembering your careful anxiety about providing ash-trays and comfortable chairs for your recruits last year; and the trouble you took about cocoa last thing at night, and having the evening meal really hot, even though the times of arrival with your lodgers might be a bit irregular. It's not *quite* like that behind the firing line, you know.

In some places the men's billets are all barns, granaries, sheds and stables, cow-houses, and the like. Here, they are nearly all rooms in empty houses. As for their condition, that, like our cocoa of a night, and cooking generally, is our own

affair. In our Division, discipline is very strict about billets. They are carefully inspected once or twice during each turnout by the Commanding Officer, and every day by the O.C. Company and the Platoon Commanders. We have no brooms, brushes, or dusters, except what we can make. But the billets have to be very carefully cleaned out twice a day, and there must be no dirt or crumbs or dust about when they are inspected. Even the mire of the yards outside has to be scraped and cleared away, and kept clear; and any kind of destruction, like breaking down doors or anything of that sort, is a serious crime, to be dealt with very severely. The men thoroughly understand all this now, and the reason of it; and they are awfully good. They leave every place cleaner and better than they found it.

In the same way it has been strictly laid down that in their attitude towards the inhabitants the men must be scrupulous. And, by Jove, they are! Wherever our troops are you will find men in khaki helping the women with their washing, drawing water, feeding stock, bringing in cows, getting in wood, and all such matters; and if our fellows haven't much French, I can assure you they are chattering in some sort of a language

most of the time. And if all this is incomprehensible to the good Frenchwomen, how is it that the latter respond with so lively a chatter, and why are they always smiling and laughing the while —even when one sees that in their eyes which tells more plainly than the mourning they wear of sacrifices they have made in the service of France? Come to think of it, do you know, that sums up the attitude of all the French women I have met, and of the old men of France, too; and it's an attitude which compels respect, while it elicits sympathy. They smile with their lips, and in the brave hearts of them they smile, too; even though they cannot altogether hide either the wearing anxiety of waiting, or, where bereavement has come, the grief of mourning for brave men lost, which shows in their eyes.

In the first convenient archway handy to our billets you will find the Company's field cooker. You have seen them trailing across the Plain down Salisbury way on field days—the same old cookers. The rations come there each day, from the Battalion Q.M. store, three miles away; and there the men draw them in their cooked form at meal-times. In every village there is a canteen where men buy stuff like chocolate, condensed

milk, tinned café-au-lait, biscuits, cake, and so forth.

In the day-time, when there are no carrying fatigues, we have frequent inspections, and once the first day out of trenches is past, every man's equipment has to be just so, and himself clean-shaven and smart. We have a bath-house down near the river, where everyone soaks in huge tubs of hot water; and in the yard of every billet you will find socks, shirts, and the like hanging out to dry after washing. By 8.30 at night all men not engaged in carrying fatigues have turned in. During the week out of trenches we get all the sleep we can. There are football matches most afternoons, and sing-songs in the early evenings. And all and every one of these things are subject to one other thing—strafe; which, according to its nature, may send us to our cellars, or to the manning of support trenches and bridge-head defences.

With regard to the officers, our batmen cook our grub, moderately well or atrociously badly, according to their capacity. But, gradually, they are all acquiring the soldierly faculty of knocking together a decent meal out of any rough elements of food there may be available. More often than

not we do quite well. Our days are pretty much filled up in looking after the men, and in the evenings, after supper, we have their letters to censor, our own to write, if we are energetic enough, and a yarn and a smoke round whatever fire there may be before turning in; after which the Boche artillery is powerless to keep us awake. At this present moment I doubt whether there's another soul in "A" Company, besides myself, who's awake, except the sentry outside headquarters. And I shall be asleep in about as long as it takes me to sign myself your

"*Temporary Gentleman.*"

BOMBARDMENT

THE day before we came back into trenches I meant to have written you, but the chance didn't arise. Now we have been in just twenty-four hours, and though the time has gone like lightning, because one has been on the jump all the while, yet, looking back, it seems ever so long since we were in billets. A good deal has happened.

For the first time since we've been out here we took over in broad daylight yesterday afternoon, and I've never known Fritz so quiet as he was. Not only were there no shells, but very few bullets were flying while we were taking over, and the ——s were clearing out for their week in billets. We had everything in apple-pie order and the night's duties mapped out, stores checked, and ammunition dished out—the extra night supply I mean—before tea, and were just thinking how remarkably well-behaved the Boche was and what a great improvement it was to take over by daylight. And then the band played!

I had been counting the supply of bombs in the Company grenade store, and was in the act of setting my watch by Taffy's, standing there in the trench at a quarter to five, when, with a roar, shells landed in six different parts of our line; not in the trench, you know, but somewhere mighty close handy. Of course, you might say there was nothing very startling about half a dozen shells landing near us, especially as nobody was hit. And that's true. But there was something queer about it, all the same. We both felt it. Taffy looked at me, and I looked at him, and "Oho!" said Taffy. And I entirely agreed.

Perhaps it was partly the unusual quietness that had come before. Anyhow, we both started at the double for Company Headquarters, and I know we both had the same idea—to see whether "the Peacemaker" wanted the word passed for everyone to take cover in such artillery shelters as we have now in this sector; and, mind you, they're miles better than they were when we first took over.

But, bless your heart! we needn't have bothered getting word about it from the O.C. Before we got near the Company dug-out the men were seeing to that for themselves, as they have been

taught to do, and the trenches were empty except, of course, for the sentries and their reliefs, who, with the observation officer, would remain at their posts even if the bottom fell out of the world.

Such a raging frenzy of fire as there was when we met "the Peacemaker," outside the signallers' cabin, you never could imagine in your life, not if I wrote about it all night. One knows now that, on the average, there were not more than ninety projectiles per minute coming over us. But at the time, I assure you, it seemed there must be about ten a second, and that shells must be literally jostling each other in the air. Apart from anything else, the air was full of falling earth, wood, and barbed wire. It was clear they had begun by ranging on our parapet and entanglements. The oddest things were falling apparently from the sky—bits of trench boots, bully beef tins, shovel handles, stakes six feet long, lengths of wire, crumpled sheets of iron, and all kinds of stuff.

I yelled to the O.C. that I would take observation duty, and Taffy wanted to take it with me. But "the Peacemaker" very properly insisted on his going to ground. We had to shout right in each other's ears. The O.C. told me our telephone wires were cut to ribbons already. "But Head-

quarters will know as much about this as we could tell 'em by now," he yelled. But he had sent off a chit by runner, just to let the C.O. know that our fellows had all taken cover, and that the heavy stuff seemed to be mostly landing on our front and the communication trenches immediately in rear. The O.C. made a cup of his hands and shouted in my ear as we crouched in the bottom of the trench:

"What you've got to do is to watch for the lifting of the curtain to our rear. Must have every man on the fire-step then. They must surely mean to come across after this."

"I hope so. 'A' Company 'll eat 'em if they do."

"That's if we can keep cover now without too many casualties. Keep as good a look-out as you can. You'll find me here, by the signallers."

So I left him, and made my way along to a little observing shelter we had made near the centre of our bit of firing line. But, when I got there, I found that shelter was just a heap of yeasty mud and rubbish. Fritz was pounding that bit out of all recognition. By this time, you know, one could hardly see six paces ahead anywhere. The smoke hung low, so that every shell in bursting made

long sheets of red flame along the smoke. And just then I got my first whiff of gas in the smoke: not a gas cloud, you know, but the burst of gas shells: lachrymatory shells some of 'em were. So I went hurrying along the line then, ordering all gas helmets on. I found most of the men had seen to this without being told.

By the way, I ought to say that, so far as I can tell, bombardment doesn't affect one's mind much. You don't feel the slightest bit afraid. Only a lot more alert than usual, and rather keyed up, as you might be if you were listening to a fine orchestra playing something very stirring. It's rather a pleasant feeling, like the exhilaration you get from drinking champagne, or hearing a great speech on some big occasion when there are thousands of people listening and all pretty well worked up. As I scrambled along the fire trench I laughed once, because I found I was talking away nineteen to the dozen. I listened, as though it were to someone else, and I heard myself saying:

"Let her rip! Let her rip, you blighters! You can't smash us, you sauer-krauters. You're only wasting the ammunition you'll be praying for presently. Wait till our heavies get to work on you, you beauties. You'll wish you hadn't spoken.

Let her rip! Another dud! That was a rotten one. Why, you haven't got the range right even now, you rotters!"

Wasn't it queer, jawing away like that, while they were hammering the stuffing out of our line? By the way, though I couldn't tell it then, our artillery was blazing away at them all the time. The fire was so tremendous that we positively had no idea our guns were in it at all. But, as a matter of fact, they were lambasting Old Harry out of the Boche support lines and communications, and the countless shells roaring over our heads were, half of them, our own.

It seemed pretty clear to me that this bombardment was on a very narrow front, much less than our Company front even. It didn't seem to be much more than a platoon front. So I hurried along to the signals and let the O.C. know this. As I had expected, he told me to concentrate all the men, except sentries, on the flanks of the bombardment sector, all with smoke helmets on, rifles fully charged, bayonets fixed, and everything ready for instant action. He had already got our Lewis guns ready in the trench on both flanks. As a fact, "the Peacemaker" was doing as much observing as I was, and I made bold to tell him I

thought it wasn't the thing for him to expose himself as much as he did.

"That's all right, old man," he shouted. "I'm looking out. I'll be careful, and you do the same. Here, stick your pipe in your mouth! It helps with the men."

I'd had to tell him that in the centre and on the extreme left we had had a few casualties. The stretcher-bearers were doing their best for them.

Not many minutes afterwards the curtain of fire appeared to be shifting back. The row was just as great, or greater. The smoke was just as dense, and there was a deal more gas in it. But it seemed to me there were very few shells actually landing along our front, and I could see the flashes of them bursting continuously a little in our rear.

As I got to the left flank of the bombarded sector I found Taffy directing the fire of a machine-gun diagonally across the front. The men were all out there, and you could see them itching for the word to get over the parapet. Their faces were quite changed. Upon my word, I'd hardly have known some of 'em. They had the killing look, and nearly every man was fiddling with his bayonet, making sure he had the good steel ready for Fritz. Seeing they were all serene, I made my way along

to the other flank. I hardly thought about it, but just went, and that shows there's something shapes our ends, doesn't it? I should have been pretty sick afterwards if I hadn't made that way when I did.

The first thing I saw on that flank was a couple of men lifting poor R——'s body from the bottom of the trench. The Infant had been killed instantaneously. His head was absolutely smashed. He had been the most popular officer in our mess since we came out.

There was no time to think, but the sight of the Infant, lying there dead, sent a kind of sudden heat through me from inside; as I felt it on patrol that night. I hurried on, with Corporal Slade close on my heels. The gassy smoke was very dense. Round the next traverse was the little bay from which the other machine-gun had been firing. It wasn't firing now. Two men were lying dead close beside it, and another badly wounded; and half across the parapet was Sergeant T——, who'd been in charge of the gun, being hauled out by his arms by two Boches, while two other Boches stood by, one holding his rifle with bayonet fixed, in the thrust position, as if inclined to run T—— through. The other Boches were

shouting something in German. They wanted to make T—— prisoner. There was blood on one side of his neck. The insolence of the thing made me quite mad for the minute, and I screamed at those Boches like a maniac.

It seems rum, but they turned and bolted into the smoke; I after them as hard as I could pelt. I shot one in the back with my revolver. He fell and, as I came up with him, I snatched his rifle from the ground beside him. I was like a lunatic. Then, just as suddenly, I came to my senses. The other Boches were out of sight in the smoke. I jumped back into the trench and put Corporal Slade on to the machine-gun, telling him to keep traversing that front. I ran farther down the trench to discover what had happened. The fire trench dipped there into a wooded hollow. The pounding of it had levelled the whole place till you could hardly make out the trench line.

Here I found the bulk of my own platoon furiously scrapping with thirty or forty Boches over the parapet. It was splendid. I can't describe the feeling, as one rushed into it. But it was absolutely glorious. And it gave me my first taste of bayonet work in earnest—with a Boche bayonet in my hand, mark you. Made me quite glad of the

bayonet practice we had at home with Sergeant W——, after he'd had the course at Aldershot. No. 1 Platoon had never let the beggars get as far as our trench, but met 'em outside. To give them their due, those Boches didn't try any of their "Kamerade" business. They did fight—until they saw half their number stuck and down; and then they turned and bolted for it into the dense smoke over No Man's Land.

They were most of 'em bayoneted in the back before I could get my fellows to turn. I didn't want them to go far in that dense fog of gassy smoke, and there was hardly any daylight left. I didn't want them tumbling into any ambush. On the way back we gathered up a score of Boche knives, a lot of their caps, two or three rifles, and a whole box of their hand grenades, with not one missing.

That was the end of the first bombardment we've seen. It lasted exactly an hour, and our gunners tell us the Boche sent more than 5000 shells over in that time. He has certainly knocked our line about rather badly. All hands are at work now repairing the trench and the wire, with a whole Company of R.E. to help. Our casualties were eighteen wounded and seven killed. We

buried thirty-one dead Boches, and they removed a good many dead. We got eleven wounded and nine unwounded Boche prisoners. Of course, they took a lot of their wounded away. They captured no prisoners from us.

I am sorry to say that another of our officers, Tony, is among the wounded, but the M.O. says he'll be back with us in a week. If only we could say that of the Infant! We are all sad about him; such a brave lad! but mighty pleased with the Company. The Brigadier says the Company has done splendidly. He was specially glad to know that the Boche collared no prisoners from us. It was our first taste, really, of bombardment, and of hand-to-hand fighting; and the men are now much keener even than they were before to get the Boche. They swear he shall pay dearly for the Infant and for six of their mates. They mean it, too, believe me. And *we* mean to help them get their payment. There isn't so much as a scratch on your

"*Temporary Gentleman.*"

THE DAY'S WORK

YOUR letters are a great joy, and I feel that I give mighty little in return for their unfailing regularity. But I am sure you will understand that out here, where there's no writing-table to turn to, one simply cannot write half as much as one would like. It's astonishing how few moments there are in which, without neglect, one can honestly say there is nothing waiting to be done.

In your letter of the fifteenth, at this moment propped up in front of me against a condensed milk tin, you say: "When you can, I wish you'd jot down for me a sort of schedule of the ordinary, average day's work in the trenches when there is nothing special on, so that I can picture the routine of your life." Oh, for more ability as a jotter down! I know by what I used to see in the papers before leaving England there's a general idea at home that the chief characteristic of trench life is its dreary monotony, and that one of our problems is how to pass the time. How the idea ever got

abroad I can't imagine. I don't see how there ever could have been a time like that in trenches. Certainly we have never had a hint of it; not the shadow of a hint. If anyone has ever tasted the boredom of idleness in the trenches—which I don't believe, mind you—there must have been something radically wrong with his Battalion; his Company Commander must have been a rotter. And I don't see how *that* could be.

A trench, especially in such country as this we're in, is not unlike a ship; a rather ancient and leaky wooden ship. If you don't keep busy about her she leaks like a sieve, gets unworkably encrusted and choked by barnacles, and begins to decay. If you don't keep improving her, she jolly soon begins to go to pieces. Only, I imagine the disintegrating process is a great deal quicker in a trench in this part of the world than it could be in the most unseaworthy of ships.

The daily routine? Well, it would be wrong to say there isn't any. There is. But it differs every day and every hour of the day, except in certain stable essentials. Every day brings happenings that didn't come the day before. One fixed characteristic is that it's a twenty-four day, rather than twelve hours of day and twelve hours

of night. Of course, the overruling factor is strafe. But there's also something pretty bossy about the condition of your trench. Some kind of repairs simply cannot wait. The trench must continue to provide cover from observation, and some sort of cover from fire, or it ceases to be tenable, and one would not be carrying out one's fundamental duty of properly holding the sector of line to which one is detailed; which, obviously, would be unthinkable. Still, as I say, there are some elements of stable routine. Well, here goes. It won't cover the ground. I'm not a competent enough jotter down for that, but such as it is——

We think of every fresh day as beginning with "Stand-to." The main idea behind this function is that dawn is the classic moment for an attack. I'm not quite sure that this or any other classic idea holds good in trench warfare, but "Stand-to" is a pretty sound sort of an institution, anyhow. We Stand-to one hour before daylight. In some Companies the precise hour is laid down overnight or for the week. Our skipper doesn't believe in that. He likes to make a sort of a test of every Stand-to, and so gives no notice beforehand of the time at which he is going to order it. And I think he's right.

You will easily understand that of all things in trench warfare nothing is more important than the ability of your Company to man the fire-step, ready to repel an attack, or to make one, on the shortest possible notice. When the order comes there must be no fiddling about looking for rifles, or appearing on the fire-step with incomplete equipment. See how useless that would be in the event of a surprise attack in the dark, when the enemy could creep very close indeed to your parapet before the best of sentries could give any alarm! Troops in the firing line must be able to turn out, equipped in every detail for fighting—for days on end of fighting—not only quickly, but instantly; without any delay at all. That is why, in the British Army, at all events—and I've no doubt the French are the same—nobody in the firing line is allowed to remove his equipment. Officer and man alike, when we lie down to sleep, we lie down in precisely the same order as we go into action: haversack and water-bottle, ammunition and everything complete. That detail of the filled water-bottle, for instance, may make all the difference between a man who is an asset to his country in a critical action and a man who is useless and a bad example. You never know the

moment at which an action that will last forty-eight hours or more is going to begin; and, though a man may keep going a long while without food, he's not much use if he cannot rinse his mouth out after a bit.

But at this rate I shall never get done. It's always so when I set out to write to you about any specific thing.

Well, we Stand-to an hour before dawn. It happens this way: "the Peacemaker" is in the trench doing something, or he comes out of the dug-out. He looks at his watch and at the sky, and he tells his orderly to bring another orderly. Then he says to the pair of them: "Pass the word to Stand-to." One bolts along the trench to the left and one to the right; and as they hurry along they give the word to every sentry and to everyone they see: "Stand-to!" Meanwhile "the Peacemaker" pokes about and observes, and jumps like a hundred of bricks on any man whose bayonet is not fixed, whose belt is unbuckled, or who is slow in getting to the fire-step. All this time he has his watch in his hand.

Pretty soon the first of those two orderlies comes racing back. Very often they see each other approaching the Officer Commanding from oppo-

site directions, and make a real race of it, and report breathlessly: "All correct, sir." To be able to do this, they must have got the word from each Platoon Sergeant. Probably about this time the officer on duty comes along from whatever part of the line he happens to have been patrolling at the time. And he also reports that all was correct in the part of the line he has come from, or that such and such a section was a bit behind this morning, and that Corporal So-and-so wants a little stirring up.

Also, by this time the Company Sergeant-Major will have arrived, with a couple of runners, each carrying under his arm a jar of mixed rum-and-water, half and half. Rum is never served out in any circumstances, save in the presence of an officer. So the officer on duty goes to one end of the line, and "the Peacemaker" to the other, and both work slowly back toward the centre, watching the serving out of the rum, and looking carefully over each man and his equipment. In the centre, the officer on duty probably waits, while the O.C. Company goes right on, so that he may see the whole of his line and every single man in it. So you see, in a way, Stand-to is a parade, as well as an important tactical operation. Because, re-

member, the sentries are keenly watching all this while, and so are a good many more pairs of eyes than look out at any other time. But, whereas the sentries are steadily gazing into the rapidly greying mysteries of No Man's Land, the other pairs of eyes are only taking occasional sharp glances, and then down again, below the parapet.

There has probably been very little firing from either side during this time. Now, very suddenly, a violent crackling starts along to the left of the line. Instantly, every exposed head ducks. Fritz has started the first verse of his morning Hymn of Hate. He always thinks to catch us, and never does. We enjoy his hymn, because we love to see him waste his ammunition, as he proceeds to do now in handsome style. Br-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r! The spray of his machine-guns traverses very neatly up and down the length of our parapet. His gunners are clearly convinced that at Stand-to time they are certain to get a few English heads. Then, as suddenly as he began, he stops; and—every head remains ducked. We've been at some pains to teach 'em that. Twenty seconds later—or it may be two minutes—the spray begins again, just where it stopped, or a hundred yards to right or left of that. The Boche is quite smart about

this; only he seems to act on the assumption that we never learn anything. That's where he's rather sold.

And, while Fritz sends forth his morning Hymn, our snipers in their carefully-hidden posts have their eyes glued on the neighbourhood of his machine-gun emplacements; and every now and again they get their reward, and the head of a Boche machine-gun observer, or some other Teuton whose curiosity overcomes his discretion, drops never to rise any more.

Before the Hymn began, you understand, the greying mystery has grown considerably less mysterious, and one has been able to see almost as much in the pearly dawn light as one will see at high noon, especially in these misty localities.

When Fritz has got through the last verse of his Hymn he is almost invariably quiet and harmless as a sucking dove for an hour or two. I take it he makes a serious business of his breakfast. And there again he often pays. Our snipers have their brekker later, and devote half an hour now to observation of the neighbourhood of all the little spirals of smoke in the Boche lines which indicate breakfast fires. They generally have some luck then; and sometimes it becomes worth while to

turn on a machine-gun or two, where Fritz's appetite has made him careless.

It is now broad daylight, and our ration parties appear, four to each platoon, trailing up the trenches from the rear with the breakfast tea and bacon. Each party dumps its dixey of tea down in the centre of the sector of its platoon, and the Platoon Sergeant dishes out to the section commanders the whack of bacon for their sections, while all hands draw their mugs of tea. The bread and jam and "dry rations" were drawn overnight. And so to breakfast, in the dug-outs or along the fire-step, according to the state of the weather. It's breakfast for all hands, except the sentries, and they are relieved to get theirs directly the men to relieve them have eaten. With the exception of those who are on duty, the officers get along to the Company dug-out for their breakfast, which the batmen have been preparing. They cook it, you know, over a brazier—some old pail or tin with holes punched in it, consuming coke and charcoal mixed, or whatever fuel one has. Fried bacon, tea, and bread-and-jam; that's our usual menu. Sometimes there may be a tin of fruit as well, or some luxury of that sort from home. Always there are good appetites and no need of sauce.

But, look here, I've just got to stop now. And yet I've only reached breakfast in my jotting of the day's routine in trenches. Isn't it maddening? Well, I'll get another chance to-night or to-morrow, and give you some more of it. I really will finish it, and I'm sorry I couldn't have done it in one letter, as it would have been done by a more competent jotter-down of things than your

"*Temporary Gentleman.*"

TOMMY DODD AND TRENCH ROUTINE

You'll be grieved to hear that cheery, indomitable little Tommy Dodd was rather badly laid out this morning; four or five nasty wounds from shrapnel. But I think he'll pull through. He has so much of the will to live, and I am sure a soul so uniformly cheerful as his must make its body easier to heal.

I wasn't six paces from him at the time. We were fastening some barbed-wire stays on screw standards we meant to put out to-night. I had just lent him my thick leather gloves after showing him exactly how I wanted these stays fixed, with little stakes bound on at the end of them, so as to save time to-night when we are over the parapet. He was busy as a beaver, as he generally is; a bit nearer to Whizz-bang Corner than was quite wise—I shall always reproach myself for not keeping him farther from that ill-omened spot—when the shell burst low overhead. I got a dozen tiny flicks myself on hands and head, which the M.O. touched up with iodine after he bandaged Tommy Dodd.

But Tommy was badly hit in the thigh, one arm, and the left shoulder.

He was parchment-colour by the time I got the stretcher-bearers along, and that was only a matter of seconds. We were close to their little dug-out, as it happened. He'd lost a lot of blood. But he grinned at me, with a kind of twist in his grin, as I helped lift him into the trench stretcher.

"Looks almost like a Blighty for me, sir, don't it? Well, even the Boche must hit something sometimes. It's only an outer this time, an' look at the thousands o' rounds when he don't get on the target at all! Sorry I couldn't 've finished them stays, sir. If you send for Davis, o' Number 5 Section, you'll find him pretty good at it, sir." And then he turned to the stretcher-bearer in front, who had the strap over his shoulder, and was just bracing himself to start off when he'd done talking. "Home, John!" he says, with a little kick up of his head, which I really can't describe. "An' be sure you don't exceed the limit, for I can't abide them nasty low perlice courts an gettin' fined."

And yet, when we got down to Battalion Headquarters, the M.O. told me Tommy Dodd ought by all rights to have been insensible, from the blood

he'd lost and the shock of those wounds: not surface wounds, you know. He'll have two or three months of hospital comfort now. I hope to goodness nothing septic will intervene. The Battalion would be the poorer for it if we lost Tommy. The M.O. says he'll pull through. The M.O. cropped little patches of hair off round my head, to rub the iodine in where I was scratched, so I look as if I had ringworm.

But to get back to business. I've got to "jot down" this everyday trench routine for you, haven't I? And I only got as far as breakfast in yesterday's letter. We'll get a move on and run through it now. I'm due on deck directly after lunch to relieve Taffy; and it's past eleven now.

After breakfast one-half the men kip down for a sleep, and the other half turn to for work. Then after the mid-day dinner, the half that rested in the forenoon, work; and throughout the night all hands stand their turn at sentry-go. That's the principle—in our Company, anyhow. But, of course, it doesn't always work out quite like that. Everything naturally gives way to strafing considerations, and at times urgent repairing work makes it necessary to forgo half or all the day

rest-time. As for the officers—there are only three of us now, besides "the Peacemaker"—one officer is always on duty, day and night. We take that in three-hour spells, the three of us. Then in the daytime, while the turn of duty is a fixed thing, we are, as a matter of fact, about at some job or another all the time; just as the O.C. Company is about all the twenty-four hours. At night we three do take our time off for sleep after a tour of duty, unless in some emergency or other. "The Peacemaker" just gets odd cat-naps when he can.

You might think that if there'd been no particular artillery strafing going on there would be no necessary repair work for the men to do in the trench. But you see, we've practically always got a new dugout in course of construction, and a refuse pit to be dug, and a sniping shelter to be made, and a new bit of trench to be cut. We have nine separate sumps where pumps are fixed in our line. And if those pumps were not well worked each day we'd soon be flooded out. There's generally some wire and standards to be got ready for putting out at night, with a few "Gooseberries" and trip wires where our entanglements have been weakened by shell fire. I've never yet

seen a trench that wasn't crying out for some sort of work on it.

At breakfast "the Peacemaker" will generally talk over the jobs he specially wants us to put through during the day, and give us any notes he may have taken during the night, round the trenches. Then chits begin coming in by 'phone from Battalion Headquarters; and chits, however short and innocent they may look, nearly always boil down to a job of work to be done. In fact, one way and another, jobs invariably invade the breakfast table and every other meal-time; and before the tea-mugs are filled up a second time one nearly always hears a batman told to "clear this end, will you, to make room for me to write a chit."

Then there will be a visitor, probably the C.O., pretty soon after breakfast, and "the Peacemaker" will trot round our line with him, discussing. Ten to one that visit will mean more jobs of work; and, occasionally, what's a deal more welcome, a new plan for a little strafe of some sort.

And then one sees the ration parties trailing up again from the rear, and dinner has arrived; some kind of a stew, you know, as a rule, with bully as alternative; potatoes if you're lucky, jam any-

how, more tea, and some sort of pickings from home parcels in the way of cake or biscuits, figs or what not. During and immediately after dinner—in the dug-out we call it lunch, from habit, but it's about the same thing as the evening meal, as a rule—we always plan out the night's work, patrols, wiring, any little strafe we have on, and that sort of thing.

We are a bit luxurious in "A" Company, and generally run to a mug of afternoon tea; sometimes (if the recent mails have been heavy) to an outburst of plum cake or shortbread with it. And an hour before dark comes evening Stand-to. Technically, this has some tactical significance, even as the morning Stand-to has actually. But as a matter of fact, in the evening it's a parade, more than anything else, to inspect rifles, check up ammunition, call the roll, and see the men are all right.

By the way, you asked me something about the rum. I don't think it's issued at all in the summer months. What we issue now, once a day, is, I think, one gill per man of the half-and-half mixture of rum and water. I think it's a gill; a pint mug has to supply eight men. I think, on the whole, it's a useful issue, and can't possibly do any harm.

It's thundering good rum; good, honest, mellow stuff, and very warming.

About seven o'clock we generally have a feed, from habit, you know, that being the time we used to have dinner in camp in England. It's the same sort of feed we have in middle day. And after that, the officer who is going on duty at midnight, say, will generally get a sleep. The usual round of night work is well under way by now—patrols, wiring parties, work on the parapet, and so on, according to what the moon allows. If there's too much light, these things have to come later.

With regard to work for sentry reliefs, the way we have in our Company is this: a sentry's relief —the sentries are always double by night and single by day—must always be within call of the sentry; therefore we never let him go beyond the bay next to the one the sentry occupies, that is, round the next traverse. Well, we hold the reliefs responsible for keeping those two bays in good order; clean and pumped, sides revetted, fire-step clear and in repair, the duck-boards lifted and muck cleared out from under them each day, and so forth. All used cartridges have to be gathered up and put in the sandbag hung over the fire-step for that purpose, for return to store.

Unless there is real strafing going on the trenches grow pretty silent after midnight. At least, it seems so to the officer on duty as he makes his way from one end of his line to the other. One gets very tired then. There's never any place where you can sit down in a trench. I am sure the O.C. Company is often actually on his feet for twenty-two out of the twenty-four hours. I say it's very quiet. Well, it's a matter of comparison, of course. If in the middle of the street at two o'clock in the morning at home you heard a few rifles fired, you would think it remarkably noisy. But here, if there's nothing going on except rifle fire, say at the rate of a couple of shots a minute, the trenches seem extraordinarily quiet; ghostly quiet.

You go padding along in your gum boots, feeling your way with your stick, which usually carries such a thick coat of mud on it that its taps on the duck-boards are hardly audible. You come round the corner of a traverse, and spot a sentry's helmet against the sky-line. "Who goes there?" he challenges you, hoarsely, and you answer, "Lieutenant So-and-so, —— Regiment," and he gives you leave to pass.

One has to be careful about these challenges.

At first the men were inclined to be casual and grunt out, "Tha's all right!" or just the name of the Regiment when challenged. One had to correct that tendency. It is easy for a Boche to learn to say "Tha's all right," or to mention the name of a Regiment opposite his line. Plenty of them have been waiters, barbers, clerks, bakers, and so on in London. So we insist on formal correctness in these challenges, and the officer or man who doesn't halt promptly on being challenged takes his chance of a bullet or a bayonet in his chest.

One stops for a word or two with every sentry, and one creeps out along the saps for a word with the listening posts. It helps them through their time, and it satisfies you that they're on the spot, mentally as well as physically. There's hardly a man in "A" Company who is not an inveterate smoker, but, do you know, I have never once got a whiff of 'baccy smoke in the neighbourhood of a sentry since we've been in trenches, never a suspicion of it! Neither have I ever found a sentry who was not genuinely watching to his front; and if the Colonel himself comes along and asks one a question there's not one of them ever betrayed into turning his eyes from his front. They're good lads.

And so the small hours lengthen into the rather larger ones, and morning Stand-to comes round again. It isn't often it's so absolutely uneventful as my jottings on the subject, of course. But you must just regard this as the merest skeleton outline of the average routine of trench days. And then, to be sure, I've left out lots of little things. Also, every day brings its special happenings, and big or little strafes. One thing we do not get in trenches, and I cannot believe we ever should, from what I've seen of it; and that is monotony, boredom, idleness, lack of occupation. That's a fancy of the newspaper writers which, so far as I know, has literally no relation whatever to the facts of trench life on the British Front in France; certainly not to anything as yet seen by your

"*Temporary Gentleman.*"

STALKING SNIPERS

We are trying to work one of our little cunning stunts to-day. Last night I had an observation patrol out, and having no special job on, decided to devote our time to the examination of the Boche wire—their entanglements, you know, in the sector opposite our particular line. I had only two men with me: one of my own Platoon scouts and a lad named Hankin, of whom I have great hopes as a sniper. He's in my No. 3 Section, and a very safe and pretty shot with a rifle, especially at long ranges. He'd never been on patrol and was most anxious to go, and to have an opportunity of looking at the Boche line, to verify his suspicions regarding certain holes in the ground which he thought their snipers used. Our patrol had two interesting results, for one of which we have to thank Hankin's intelligence. The other was a bit of luck. The reason I took such a small patrol was that the aim was observation pure and simple; not strafing; and the men were more than

usually tired, and had a lot of parapet repair work which had to be put through before daylight.

It was about a quarter to one in the morning when we went out, there having been too much moonlight before then. Hankin had prepared a regular chart of the Boche line from his own observations from his sniping post; quite a clever little map it is, showing clearly his suspected sniping shelters, of which there are four. We drew a blank in the first two of these, and for the third had to tack back from the line of the Boche wire, towards our own, along the side of an old sap, all torn to bits and broken in with shell fire. Hankin felt certain he had seen the flash of rifles from this hole; but I thought it was too near our own wire to attract any Boche sniper for regular use.

I need hardly say that on a job of this sort one moves very slowly, and uses the utmost possible precaution to prevent noise. It was now absolutely dark, the moon having gone down and the sky being much overcast. But for my luminous-faced compass (which one consults under one's coat flap to prevent it from showing) we should have been helpless. As it was, on the bearings

I worked out before starting, we steered comfortably and fairly accurately.

All of a sudden came a shock, a rifle fired, as it seemed, under our noses, actually from about twenty-five paces ahead on the track we were making.

"That's him, sir," breathed Hankin in my right ear.

I looked at the compass. The shot came from dead on the spot where Hankin's third hole should be; the one we were making for then.

"How about a little bomb for him, sir?" whispered the scout on my left.

But I shook my head. Too much like looking for a needle in a bundle of hay, and too much like asking the Boche for machine-gun fire. It was fair to assume the Boche sniper who fired that shot would be facing our trenches; the same direction in which we were facing at that moment, since we were working back from the German wire towards our own. I pushed my lips close up to Hankin's ear and whispered: "We'll try stalking him." Hankin nodded, quite pleased.

Then I whispered to the scout to follow us very, very carefully, and not too closely. I didn't want him to lose touch, but, for the sake of quietness,

one would sooner, of course, go alone. We kept about six paces between us laterally, Hankin and myself, and we advanced by inches.

I must say I should have been grateful for a shade more light, or less inky blackness. The edge of that sniper's hole was not sloping, but sheer; and, crawling slowly along, I struck my right hand clean over it into nothingness, letting my chest down with an audible bump. Right before me then I heard a man's body swing round on the mud, and the sniper let out some kind of a German exclamation which was a sort of squeal. It was, really, much more like some wild animal's cry than anything human. I had to chance it then. The sound was so amazingly close. I couldn't see him, but— And when I sprang, the thing my hands gripped on first was not the beggar's windpipe or shoulders, as I had hoped, but his rifle, carried in his left hand on his left side.

It was rather like tom-cats coming to blows. I swear he spat. As you know, I'm rather heavy, and I think my spring, slightly to his left, knocked him off his balance. He hadn't any chance. But, though I got his left wrist, and covered his mouth with my chest, I was a bit uneasy about

his right hand, which for the moment I couldn't find. Lucky for me he hadn't got a dagger in it, or he might have ripped me open. But Hankin pretty soon found his right hand, and then we hauled him up to his feet. I passed his rifle to the scout, and we just marched him along the front of our wire to Stinking Sap, and so into our own front trench; Hankin holding one of his arms, I taking the other, and the scout coming behind with the muzzle of the man's own rifle in the small of his back. There was no need to crawl, the night being as black as your hat; and in three or four minutes we had that sniper in front of "the Peacemaker" in the Company dug-out.

It was neat, wasn't it? And all thanks to the ingenious Hankin's careful observations and his chart. He'll get his first stripe for that, and very soon have another to keep it company, or I'm much mistaken. "The Peacemaker" was delighted, and wrote a full report of the capture to be sent down to Headquarters with the prisoner. Snipers are worth capturing, you know, and this looked like an intelligent chap whose cross-examination might be useful to our Brass-hats.

Queer thing about this sniper, he spoke English

almost like a native. We are not allowed to examine prisoners on our own account. All that's done by the powers behind the line. But this fellow volunteered a little talk while we were getting the report made out. He was quite satisfied when he realised we were not going to harm him in any way, but it was perfectly clear he had expected to be done in. You'd have thought he would have known better. He'd spent nine years in London, part of the time a waiter, and later a clerk. He had lived at Kennington, and then in lodgings on Brixton Hill, I'll trouble you. Extraordinary, isn't it? He'd been told that London was practically in ruins, and that the Zepps had made life there impossible. He also thought that we in France were completely cut off from England, the Channel being in the hands of the German Navy, and England isolated and rapidly starving! I gather the Boches in the fighting line have no notion at all of the real facts of the war.

Well, having been so far successful, we decided to resume our patrol, the main purpose of which—examination of the Boche wire—hadn't been touched yet. So off we went again down Stinking Sap; and I could see that Hankin and Green, the scout,

bore themselves as victors, with something of the swank of the old campaigner and hero of a thousand patrols. A great asset, mind you, is a reasonable amount of swank. These two had not been out before this night, but already they climbed over the parapet and moved about in No Man's Land with a real and complete absence of the slightest hint of nervousness.

Now I must cut this short because I have to go an errand for "the Peacemaker," to have a little talk with a Battery Commander. We had a pretty good prowl up and down the Boche wire, and made an interesting discovery on the extreme left of our sector. There was a shade more light then; not from the moon, of course, but from stars; the sky having become less overcast. I ran my nose right up against a miniature sign-post; a nice little thing, with feathers stuck in cracks near the top of it, presumably to give Boche patrols their bearings. I should have liked to take it away as a souvenir, but I didn't want to arouse Hun suspicions, so left it. The interesting thing was that this little sign-post—about eighteen inches high, planted among the front wire stakes—pointed the way in to the Boche trenches by an S-shaped lane through their wire entanglements;

so shaped, of course, as to prevent it from being easily seen from our line.

We crawled along this lane a bit, far enough to make sure that it was a clear fairway into the Boche front trench. Then I got a careful bearing, which I subsequently verified half a dozen times; and we made our way back to Stinking Sap. I haven't time to tell you of our cunning plan about this discovery. That's what I'm to see the Battery Commander about. But if we can make the arrangement we want to make with the gunners, we'll bring off a nice little bombing raid to-night, and I'll let you know all about it in my next letter. Meanwhile I must scurry off, or I shall miss the Battery Commander in his rounds, and there will be a telling-off for your

"*Temporary Gentleman.*"

AN ARTFUL STUNT

OUT of trenches again. I wanted to write you yesterday to tell you about the bombing raid of our last night in; but we had a full day, and were not relieved till late evening; so I got no chance of writing till this afternoon. But I can tell you we came out with our tails well up this time, and "A" Company putting on more side than ever. I dare say "D" Company, our closest rivals, will put up something pretty startling when we go in again. They're very determined to beat our record in every kind of strafing, and I'm bound to say they do put up some good shows. They've two more officers than we have now, and the Boche has discovered that they are very much out for business.

Whether we get Bavarians or Prussians opposite us it makes small odds; they've no earthly chance of a quiet time while we're in the line. The public at home read about the big things, and I suppose when they read that "The rest of the

Front was quiet," they're inclined to wonder how we put our time in. Ah, well! the "quiet" of the dispatches wouldn't exactly suit a conscientious objector, I can assure you. It's a kind of "quiet" that keeps Master Boche pretty thoroughly on the hop. But on the whole, I'm rather glad the dispatches are like that. I'd be sorry to see 'em make a song and dance about these little affairs of ours. Only, don't you run away with the idea that when you read "Remainder of the Front quiet," it means the Boche was being left alone; for he isn't, not by long odds.

You will remember that opposite our extreme left I had discovered an S-shaped opening leading through the barbed wire to the Boche front line, so cut, no doubt, for the convenience of their patrols at night. We decided that we would make use of that opening for a bombing raid on our last night in. Now, you must understand that one of the chief uses of the barbed-wire entanglements is to keep off the prowling bomber. The entanglements extend to, say, forty to sixty paces from the trench. You cannot hope to make accurate practice in bomb-throwing at a distance of more than thirty yards. Consequently, as I explained before, to shy bombs into the average trench the

bomber must worry his way through twenty paces or so of barbed-wire entanglements. It is very difficult to do that without attracting the attention of sentries, and impossible to do it quickly with or without noise. Hence you perceive the unpleasant predicament of the bomber when he has heaved his first bomb. He has offered himself as a target to the Boche machine-guns and rifles at a moment when he is in the midst of a maze of barbed wire, from which he can only hope to retreat slowly and with difficulty.

Then why not cut a lane through the Boche wire by means of shells, just before dark, and use that to bomb from after dark? Excellent. Only, if you were the Boche and we cut a lane through your wire one evening just before dark, wouldn't you train a machine-gun or two on that opening so that you could sweep it with fire at any moment you wished during the night; and wouldn't you have a dozen extra rifles with keen eyes behind 'em trained on the same spot; and wouldn't you be apt to welcome that nice little lane as a trap in which you could butcher English Tommies like sitting pheasants? Wouldn't you now?

Well, my business with the Battery Commander was to get on his right side and induce him to

expend a certain number of rounds from his dear little guns that afternoon in cutting a nice line through the Boche entanglements opposite the extreme right of our line. It happened that, without interfering with the sort of sinking fund process by which the lords of the guns build up their precious reserves of ammunition, this particular lord was in a position to let us have a few rounds.

Of course, our attitude towards the gunners is not always strictly reasonable, you know. We are for ever wanting them to spend ammunition, while their obvious duty is to accumulate ammunition greedily and all the time against the hours of real need, so that when these hours come they may simply let everything rip—take the lid right off. However, for reasons of their own, apart from mine, it happened fortunately that the gunners were not at all averse from giving that bit of the Boche line a mild pounding; and, accordingly, they promised us a nice neat lane on the extreme right by nightfall.

We said nothing about the beautiful S-shaped lane on the extreme left, which Master Boche thought was known only to himself. Observe our extreme artfulness. We proceeded to train a

grenade rifle on the extreme right, likewise a machine-gun. Then we proceeded to tell off our best bombers, and overhaul carefully a good supply of hand-grenades for use in the S-shaped opening on our extreme left.

Until midnight there was a certain amount of moonlight, and for several hours we kept the Boche very busy on our extreme right, where, with a trifling expenditure of ammunition, the guns had cut a lane for us through his barbed wire. I've no doubt at all that Fritz had several machine-guns concentrated on that spot, and a bunch of riflemen too. He made up his mind he would have the English on toast in that lane, and we encouraged him to think so.

You know, at night-time it is not very easy to tell the difference between the explosion of a hand-grenade and that of a rifle-grenade. But whereas the hand-grenade could only be lobbed in from among the wire, the rifle-grenade could easily be sent over from our trench at that particular spot on our right. So we sent 'em over at all kinds of confusing intervals. And then, when Boche opened machine-gun fire across the lane, under the impression that our bombers were at work there, we replied with bursts of machine-

gun fire on his parapet opposite the lane, thereby, I make no doubt, getting a certain number of heads. It is certain they would be looking out, and equally certain they would not be expecting fire from our trenches, when they thought we had our own bombers out there.

It was an attractive game, and we kept it going till nearly midnight. Then we stopped dead, leaving them to suppose we had given up hope of overcoming their watchfulness. We arranged to reopen the ball at 1.30 A.M. precisely, with rifle-grenades and machine-gun fire as might prove suitable, but with no end of a row in any case.

At one o'clock I started from Stinking Sap, on our extreme left, with twelve of our best bombers, each carrying an apronful of bombs. There wasn't a glimmer of any kind of light. We made direct for the S-shaped opening, and lay down outside the wire there. In our own trench, before starting, we had made all arrangements. I had six men on either side of me, and each man knew precisely what his particular job was. "The Peacemaker" never tires of insisting on that principle, and, of course, he is right. Nothing is any good unless it is worked out beforehand so that each man knows exactly his job, and con-

centrates on that without reference to anyone else, or any hanging about waiting instructions.

At 1.20 we began crawling down the S-shaped opening in our proper order. At 1.30 the first rifle-grenade ripped over from the extreme right of our line. Others followed in quick succession, and on the report of the sixth we jumped to our feet and ran forward, extending to right and left from me as we reached the inside of the wire, and chucking our first bombs—thirteen of 'em—as we got into position. It was so close there was no possibility of missing, and I can tell you thirteen bombs make some show when they all explode beautifully right inside a trench a few yards in front of you.

Then we all scrambled over the parapet down into the trench over a front of, say, thirty paces. The six men on my right hand at once turned to their right, and those on my left to their left. It worked splendidly. Each party travelled along the trench as quickly as it could, bombing over each traverse before rounding it. The row was terrific.

In that order each party went along six successive bays of the trench. Then immediately they began to reverse the process, travelling more

slowly this time and bombing more thoroughly. They were working back on their centre now, you understand, still bombing outward, of course. We had the luck to strike a splendid piece of trench with no fewer than three important dug-outs in it, and we made a shambles of each of them. It was wildly exciting while it lasted, but I suppose we were not more than four or five minutes in the trench. We exploded thirty-two bombs during those few minutes, every single one of them with good effect; and when we scrambled out into the S-shaped opening again we took with us an undamaged Boche machine-gun and four prisoners, one of them wounded and three unwounded. We killed nine men in the trench, and a good round number in the three dug-outs. I had a bunch of maps and papers from the first of those dug-outs. And we didn't improve their trench or the dug-outs. Thirty-two bombs make a difference.

The machine-gun hampered us a bit, but I can tell you we made pretty good time getting across to Stinking Sap. The Boches were hopelessly confused by the whole business, and while we were crossing to the extreme left of our own line they were wildly blazing at our extreme right and pouring flares and machine-gun fire over the lane

through their wire. Naturally, nobody was in the least exposed on our right, except perhaps the man operating the machine-gun, which probably did good execution among Boche observers of that neat little lane our artillery had cut for us.

It was a delightful show and cost us nothing in casualties, except two men very slightly wounded, one in the right foot and the other in the left hand and arm from our own bomb splinters. But, as our good old bombing Sergeant said, it "fairly put the wind up them bloomin' sauer-krauters." Incidentally, and owing far more to the fine behaviour of the men than to anything I did, it earned a lot of bouquets from different quarters for your

"*Temporary Gentleman.*"

P.S.—Next day's report as served up to you and the public in the newspapers at home would, of course, and rightly enough no doubt, include our sector in the "remainder of the Front," which was "quiet." Or we might be included in a two-line phrase about "minor activities," or "patrols were active on various points of the line"—as they certainly are all the time.

THE SPIRIT OF THE MEN

THE parcels from W——'s arrived all safe and sound, thanks to your careful arrangements, and we are, in consequence, living in the lap of luxury. The tinned fruit is specially appreciated, and very good for us, I've no doubt. By the way, you will be glad to know that the boiler-maker's suit in one piece of water-proofed canvas is a huge success. I wore it on that last bombing raid. For patrol work, or wiring, for anything over the parapet, and in the trench, too, at night-time, for instance, I don't think there's anything to beat it. There's nothing to catch or get in one's way, and it's a great joy to keep one's ordinary clothes clean and decent. On patrol it's better than oilskin, because it's silent—doesn't rustle.

I dare say you've heard that phrase—I forget whose it is—about the backbone of the Army being the non-commissioned man. I suspect it was all right when it was written, and goodness knows, there's not much the matter with the non-

commissioned man to-day. Only, there isn't the difference that there was between the N.C.O. and the "other ranks"—the men. The N.C.O. isn't the separate type he was, because the N.C.O. of to-day is so often the man of yesterday; promotion having necessarily been rapid in the New Army. We had to make our own N.C.O.'s from the start. They're all backbone, now, men and N.C.O.'s alike. And the officers are quite all right, thank you, too. I doubt whether officers in any Army have ever worked harder than the officers of our New Army—the "Temporary Gentlemen," you know—are working to-day. They have had to work hard. Couldn't leave it to N.C.O.'s, you see, because, apart from anything else, they've had to make the N.C.O.'s out of privates; teach 'em their job. So we're all backbone together.

And when you hear some fellow saying "The men are splendid," you need not think he's just paying a conventional tribute or echoing a stereotyped kind of praise. It's true; "true as death," as Harry Lauder used to sing; it's as true as anything I know. It's Gospel truth. The men are absolutely and all the time splendid.

I'm not an emotional sort of a chap, and I'm sure before the war I never gave a thought to such

things; but, really, there is something incurably and ineradicably fine about the rough average Englishman, who has no surface graces at all. You know the kind I mean. The decency of him is something in his grain. It stands any test you like to apply. It's the same colour all the way through. I'm not emotional; but I don't mind telling you, strictly between ourselves, that since I've been out here in trenches I've had the water forced into my eyes, not once, but a dozen times, from sheer admiration and respect, by the action of rough, rude chaps whom you'd never waste a second glance on in the streets of London; men who, so far from being exceptional, are typical through and through; just the common, low-down street average.

That's the rough, rude, foul-mouthed kind, with no manners at all, and many ways that you hate. But I tell you, under the strain and stress of this savage existence he shows up for what he really is, under his rough, ugly hide: he's jewel all through without an ounce of dirty Boche meanness or cruelty in his whole carcass. You may hate his manners if you like but you can't help loving him; you simply can't help it if you work alongside of him in the trenches in face of the enemy.

And that's not the only type we've got that makes you want to take your hat off to Tommy, and that puts a real respect, which perhaps the civilian doesn't understand, into your salutes. (It's only silly puppy boys, or officers who've never been in the presence of an enemy, or faced immediate danger with men, who can't be bothered properly and fully acknowledging salutes. You watch a senior, one who's learned his lessons in real service, and you'll find nothing grudging or casual or half-hearted. We get into the French way here, with a hint of the bow, a real salutation in our salutes.) Even more striking, I sometimes think, is the sterling stuff we find in types of men in the ranks who haven't naturally anything rough or hard about them: like my ex-draper chap, you know, in No. 3 Platoon, Ramsay. We've a number of the same calibre. He was a pillar of his chapel at home and—of all things—a draper: a gentle, soft-spoken dealer in ribbons and tape. I told you, I think, how he fought with a man in his section when he fancied he was not going to be allowed to go out one night with a bombing party.

You read about calling for volunteers. With our lot it's hopeless to call for volunteers for a dangerous job. The only thing to do would be to

call for volunteers to stay behind. The other thing's simply a way of calling out the whole Company; and if it happens to be just half a dozen you want, that's awkward.

Then there's the matter of grousing—growling among themselves about this and that. You would be deceived about this until you got to know them a bit. It's a queer thing, and not easy to explain, but grousing is one of the passions of their lives, or, perhaps it would be truer to say, a favourite form of recreation. But, mark you this, only when everything is going smoothly, and there is nothing real to grumble about. It would seem to be absolutely forbidden to growl when there's anything to growl about; a sort of unwritten law which, since we've been out here, anyhow, is never transgressed.

It's rather fine, this, you know, and very English. So long as there's a little intermittent grousing going on you can be quite sure of two things—that there's nothing wrong and that the men are in good spirits and content. If there's no grousing, it means one of two things—either that the men are angered about something, in which case they will be unusually silent, or that we are up against real difficulties and hardships involving real suffer-

ing, in which case there will be a lot of chaffing and joke-cracking and apparent merriment.

Queer, isn't it? But I think it's a true description. If a long day's hard labour—clearing out a trench and building up a parapet, we'll say—is undone and washed out just as it's finished by a succession of Boche oil-cans, mortars, and general bombardment, which also lays out a few good men, and blows the next meal rations sky-high, so that there's the prospect of a long night's extra hard work where some rest had been expected, and all on an empty stomach—then you'll hear no grousing at all, but any number of jocular remarks:

"I tell you, the Army of to-day's *all right!*" "We don't get much pay, but, my word, we *do* see life!" "Save me a lot o' trouble, this will. My fightin' weight was goin' up a lot too fast, but this'll save me givin' up my port wine an' turtle soup!" Then some wag pretends to consult his newspaper, and, looking up, announces that: "On the remainder of the Front the night was comparatively quiet." "Yes," says another, quoting further from the imaginary news, "and the banquet which had been arranged for 'A' Company was pos'poned till the following day." "When it is hoped," adds yet another joker, "that a number of

prominent Boche prisoners will attend." Elaborate winks and nods; and one man positively licks his lips as he mutters: "Gosh! If only they really *would* come over the sticks to-night; if only they would!" "Reg'ler bloomin' pacifist, isn't he?" remarks a student of the Press, "longin' to welcome the gentle Hun with open arms, he is —not 'arf!" "We'll welcome him all right, if only the beggar 'd come. I'd like to use a section or two of 'em for buildin' up this bloomin' parapet. Be stiffer than these sand-bags full o' slush." "Shame! An' you a yewmanitarian, too. Why, how'd our poor chaps ever be able to stand the smell of all them potted Huns, an' so close, too? You're too harsh, mate; reg'ler Prussian, I call you."

So it goes on. It's a bitter cold night. They are up nearly to their thighs in half-frozen slush. Their day's work has been entirely undone in half an hour, and has to be done over again without any interval for rest; and the supper ration's "gone West." You can hardly imagine what the loss of a meal means, with a night like that ahead of you, and occasional shells still dropping round the bit you must repair. They look awful ruffians, these chaps; caked all over with mud, hair and eye-

brows and all; three or four days' stubble on their chins, and all kinds of ribaldry on their lips. They love their ease and creature comforts at least as much as any conscientious objector could; and God knows they are here as far removed from ease and creature comfort as men well could be—entirely of their own free will. And they will carry on all night, cracking their simple jokes and chaffing one another, and jostling each other to get to the front if one or two are required for anything extra dangerous. And the spirit that dictates their little jokes, isn't it as fine as any shown in bygone days by the aristocrats of France and England? If you told these fellows they were aristocrats, imagine how they'd take it! "'Ere, 'op it! Not so much of it! Wotcher givin' us?"

But aren't they—bless 'em! I tell you, when I come to compare 'em with the fellows we're up against across the way; with those poor devils of machine-driven Boches, with their record of brutish murder and swinishness in Belgium—why, there's not a shadow of doubt in my mind they are real aristocrats. The war has helped to make them so, of course. But, whatever the cause, they stand out, with the splendidly gallant *poilus* of France: true aristocrats—five hundred miles of

'em from the North Sea to Switzerland, pitted against the deluded and brutalised, machine-driven Boches. There are no officers and machine driving our fellows, or the cheery, jolly French soldiers. Held back occasionally, directed always, they may be. There's no need of any driving on our side. Unquestioning obedience to an all-powerful machine may be a useful thing in its way. I know a better, though; and that's convinced, willing, eager determination, guided—never driven—by officers who share it, and share everything else the men have and do. And that's what there is all down our side of the line, from the North Sea to Switzerland.

But, look here; I've just read through my last page, and it seems to me I've been preaching, ranting, perhaps. I'd better stow it and get on with my work. You see, one can't *talk* this kind of thing; and yet—I don't know, one feels it pretty often, and rather strongly. It's a bit of a relief to tell you something about it—in writing. Even to you, I probably shouldn't, by word of mouth, you know. One doesn't, somehow; but this sort of chatting with a pen is different. All I actually want to say, though it has taken such a lot of paper to say it on, is that the men really are

splendid. I love them. (It certainly is easier writing than talking.) I want you to know about it; to know something about these chaps—they come from every class of the community—so that you'll love 'em, too. I wish we could make every woman, and every man and child, too, in England understand how fine these fellows are, and how fine, really, the life they're leading is.

For sheer hardness and discomfort there's nothing in the life of the poorest worker in England to compare with it. They are never out of instant danger. And the level of their spirits is far higher than you'd find it in any model factory or workshop at home. Death itself they meet with little jokes; I mean that literally. And the daily round of their lives is simply full of little acts of self-sacrifice, generosity, and unstudied, unnoted heroism, such as famous reputations are based upon in civil life in peace time. I feel I can't make it plain, as it deserves to be. I wish I could. But you must just accept it because I say it, and love 'em all—the French as well as ours—because they've made themselves loved by your

"*Temporary Gentleman.*"

AN UNHEALTHY BIT OF LINE

RATHER to the general surprise, we have been moved into a new sector of the line, immediately south of what we called "our own." We have not been told why—the Olympians do not deal in whys and wherefores—but, according to gossip, we can take our choice between the wish to make us all familiar with the general lie of the land round here, to be the better prepared for a push; and the undoubted fact that a new Division is being moved into the line, and that our move southward facilitates this. Perhaps the real reason of the move is a mixture of both these; but, whether or no, the move itself provides striking evidence of the marked differences which exist between different parts of the line, and the extremely narrow and circvmscribed nature of the knowledge one gets of the Front while serving in trenches.

Our "B" Company is holding just now the subsection which actually adjoins the right of the sector we used to hold. We are on the right of

"B," and "C" is on our right, with "D" back in the support line. Even "B's" bit, though it does adjoin our old beat, differs greatly from that; and our present short line is hemispheres away from the sector we knew before. There's not very much of it—about half the length of the line we last held—but what there is is hot and strong, I can tell you. The way in which "B" Company's bit differs is chiefly that it's in sandy soil, instead of all clay, and so is much drier and cleaner, more habitable in every way than anything we are accustomed to. But our bit, variously known as Petticoat Lane (why, I can't imagine), Cut-Throat Alley (obvious enough), and The Gut—well, our bit is, as "the Peacemaker" said directly he saw it, "very interesting." I think that's about the kindest thing you can say of it; and interesting it certainly is.

To begin with, the greatest distance between any one spot in it and the Boche front line is seventy or eighty yards; and there's a place at which it's only half that. But the salient point in the whole sector is this: the half of our line that is seventy or eighty yards from the Boche line has between it and the Boche line a string of craters, the far lips of which are not more than fifteen

to twenty paces from Fritz's sentries. These craters are sometimes occupied by the Boche and sometimes by us; but nobody attempts to hold them by day; they don't give shelter enough for that; and the betting as to who is to hold tnem on any given night is about even.

You might almost say, "But why should anybody want to hold the beastly things?" And if you ever set foot in one of them, you'd say it with some feeling, for it's like trying to walk, or rather to crawl, in a bottomless pit of porridge. When dusk is coming on of an evening half a dozen of our bombers may start crawling from our parapet, making for the nearest crater. Maybe Fritz is dull and misses them. Maybe he opens such a hot fire they have to shin back quick. Maybe, just as we are getting close to the near edge of a crater, and flattering ourselves we've been a bit too nippy for the Boche this time, we get a rousing welcome from the crater itself, in the shape of three or four well-aimed bombs among us. Then those of us who are still able to think realise that the Boche has been a bit beforehand and got there first. Next night the process is reversed. During last night those confounded craters changed hands three times, remaining at last, I am glad to

say, with us. We lost one man killed and two wounded. But we brought back two wounded and one dead Boche, and we reckon to have knocked out at least six others.

It was a nightmare of a night, to tell the truth, but nothing big enough to get into dispatches. One point about the holding of these craters is that it enables you to lob bombs, or almost anything else for that matter, into the Boche front trench. Down here we really are learning something about oil-cans, mortars, and short range heavy stuff generally. It's very much hand-to-hand warfare, and, I suppose because of that, much more savage and more primitive than anything we've seen before. There practically isn't any No Man's Land here. It's just our trench and their trench and the muddy, bloody cock-pit between, all churned into a slushy batter by high explosives, and full of all manner of ghastly remains. Souvenirs! By Heavens! the curio hunters could find all they wanted here within a few yards of where I'm sitting, but not many of 'em would have the spunk to gather 'em in. You see, I haven't any great respect for the souvenir hunter. He seems a ghoulish sort of a creature to me, and I can't believe the cynical old "Peace-

maker" when he says the bulk of them, and all the more inveterate sort, are women.

The C.O. tells "the Peacemaker" he is so arranging things that no Company will get more than four days on end in Petticoat Lane, and then the other three days of the turn in trenches, in the support line, where Battalion Headquarters is. "A" Company, of course, takes glory to itself for having been the first to be sent in here, and I think this fully compensates them for the fact that nobody's had any rest worth speaking about since we got in. We shall probably do better in that respect when we have time to get used to the change. In fact, I can see a difference already in the men's attitude. But, mind you, the change is radical, from two hundred yards' interval between yourself and Fritz, down to fifty yards. It affects every moment of your life, and every mortal thing you do. More, it actually affects what you say. You don't make any telephonic arrangements about patrols and that sort of thing here. We are learning German at a great rate. But it was very startling to our fellows the first night, when they found they could hear voices in the enemy line. It seemed to bring Fritz and his ingenious engines very close indeed.

But already the men have begun to crack their little jokes about it, and pretend to be careful about setting down a canteen of tea or a bit of bread lest one of "them bloomin' sauerkrauters lean over and pick it up before you can turn round —hungry blighters!" I confess I'm conscious that the nearness represents a great deal of added nerve strain; but, thank goodness, the men don't seem to feel it a bit. They're just as jolly as ever. But it is mighty intimate and primitive, you know.

Imagine! The first thing I laid my hand on when I got into a crater on our first night, after we'd bombed Fritz out of it, was the face of a wounded Boche; and he bit my little finger to the bone, so that I had to have it washed and dressed by the M.O. for fear of poisoning. It's nothing; but I mention it as an instance of the savage primitiveness of this life at close quarters with the Boche.

There's simply no end to his dodgy tricks here. Three or four of 'em will cry out for help from a crater—in English, you know—and pretend to be our own men, wounded and unable to move, or Boches anxious to give themselves up. And then, if anyone's soft enough to get over the parapet

to go and lend a hand, they open a hot fire, or wait till we get very near and then bomb. We had verbal warnings in plenty from the Company we relieved, but it's experience that teaches; and, whilst they may not be brilliant tricksters—they're not,—our fellows will at all events never allow the same trick to be worked off twice on us.

By his fondness for all such petty tricks as these —and, of course, they have dozens of dirtier ones than this—the Boche has rather shut the door on chivalry. Given half a chance, the natural inclination of our men is to wage war as they would play cricket—like sportsmen. You've only to indicate to them that this or that is a rule of the game—of any game—and they're on it at once. And if you indicated nothing, of their own choice they'd always play roughly fair and avoid the dirty trick by instinct. But the Boche washes all that out. Generosity and decency strike him as simply foolishness. And you cannot possibly treat him as a sportsman, because he'll do you down at every turn if you do; and here in Petticoat Lane being done down doesn't only mean losing your money. As a rule, you haven't any of that to lose. It means—"going West for keeps"; that is, being killed. It's that sort of

thing that has made Petticoat Lane life savage and primitive; and the fact that it's so close and intimate as to be pressing on you all round all the time, that is what gives the additional nerve strain.

It is, of course, a great place for little raids. The trenches are so close that you're no sooner out of your own than you're on top of theirs. And I take it as evidence of the moral superiority being on this side of the line, that we see very much more of their trenches than they ever see of ours. It is a great deal more difficult to repair trenches here than it was when we were a couple of hundred yards away from the enemy, because of the frequency of the oil-cans and bombs. The consequence is that, from the point of view of the cover they give, both our trenches and the Boches' are much inferior to those we had before. But, curiously enough, we have some very decent dug-outs here, deep and well protected.

In fact, take it all round, we are not so badly off at all. And "interesting" the place most certainly is. ("The Peacemaker" generally means "dangerous" when he says "interesting.") There's something doing in the strafing line pretty nearly all the time; and strafing is a deal more interesting

than navvying, pumping, and mud-shovelling. The chances for little shows of one sort and another are more numerous here than where we were before. We've tried one or two already, and when we get back into the support line you shall have full particulars from your somewhat tired but quite jolly

"*Temporary Gentleman.*"

THEY SAY——

We were relieved in Petticoat Lane by "D" Company last night, and took the place they'd held in the support line; "a corner of Heaven itself," of course, after The Gut. And I have had a most luxurious and delightful day to-day, out of trenches altogether.

Our O.C. "the Peacemaker"—you do remember, don't you, that the Officer Commanding the Battalion is the C.O., and the Officer Commanding the Company the O.C.: saves confusion—is an awfully good chap. He didn't say anything about it, but I feel sure he put me on my job of to-day—chose me for it—because he thought it would be good for me. He was ordered to send an officer to arrange about billets for the Company in —— ready for when we go out. Taffy's been a bit under the weather in Petticoat Lane, and is able to get a rest here in support. This meant rather more sticking to it for me in the front line, and, as a matter of fact, I didn't get an hour's sleep while

we were there. We had little strafes going most of the time, and I was rather cheap when we came out last night; bit shaky, you know; that's all. Two Boche mines were exploded in The Gut while we were there; both with extraordinarily little loss to us. But I was lifted out of the trench by one of 'em; and I suppose these things do indirectly affect one a bit, somehow, even when there is nothing to show for it; at all events, when they are combined with shortage of sleep.

Anyhow, I'm as right as ninepence to-night, and had a fine sleep after midnight yesterday. And to-day, with "the Peacemaker's" horse for company, I've been playing the country gentleman at large and fixing up billets for the Company, and done pretty well for 'em, too. It was something of a race between Grierson of "D" and myself for the best officers' mess and sleeping quarters in ——; but Grierson hadn't much chance, really. He hasn't even my smattering of French, and his O.C. had not lent him a horse.

The goodwife at the place I've got for ourselves is a torrential talker, and in rounding up the boys and girls working on her farm she shows a bit of a temper; but I'm certain she's a jolly capable manager, and she has promised to cook for us,

which will mean a fine change from the batman's efforts in that line. Also the billets themselves are good, those for the men being the best I've seen anywhere: dry as a chip, and thoroughly sheltered from the wind. We shall be in clover for our week out, especially as I think —— is a bit too far back to admit of our being on trench fatigues at all while out.

I did enjoy the pottering about on my own, and the nearest firing being three or four miles away all the time, made everything seem so extraordinarily peaceful after the roaring racket and straining watchfulness of Cut-Throat Alley; where one's eyes sort of ache from trying to look all ways at once, and one's ears and head generally get dead from the effort of recording the precise meaning of each outstanding roar in the continuous din. Also I met two or three interesting people, including the Town Major in ——.

I had some grub about one o'clock in a big *estaminet*, almost a restaurant, really; and it was most interesting, after the trenches, to listen to the gossip and eat without feeling you had to look out for anything. There are a number of French residents left in this place, and this makes it different from the village we were last in, just

behind the line, where the inhabitants have left, and the place is purely a camp, and partly in ruins at that. This place still has a natural human sort of life of its own, you know. And there are women in it, and a priest or two, and cows and sheep, and a town-crier, and that sort of thing—something fascinatingly human about all that, though it is within four miles of the firing line.

The café was simply full of rumours and gossip. Military gossip is, of course, taboo with strangers and civilians, and rightly, since one cannot be sure who is and who is not a spy. But I suppose there's no harm in it among people who can recognise each other's uniforms and badges. Anyhow, I heard a lot to-day, which may or may not have anything in it.

The things that interested me most were things about our own bit of front, and there were two definite reports about this. First, I heard that we are to throw out a new front-line trench to bridge the re-entrant south of Petticoat Lane. And then I heard we are to make a push to collar the Boche front line on the bend opposite us, because a few hundred yards of line there would mean a lot to us in the straightening of our front generally, and in washing out what is undoubtedly a strong corner

for the Boche now, because it gives him some fine enfilading positions. If this were brought off it would wash out The Gut altogether as firing line, and that in itself would be a godsend. Also it would mean a real push, which is naturally what we all want. We think the fact of that extra Division having been fitted into our line rather endorses the report, and are feeling rather bucked in consequence. The whole Battalion, and for that matter the whole Division, is just spoiling for the chance of a push, and I doubt whether we've a man who wouldn't volunteer for the front line of the push at this moment, and jolly glad of the chance.

I said in my last letter that I'd tell you about our little strafing stunts while we were in Petticoat Lane. But, really, this new prospect of a push and the report about the new front-line trench to be cut make them seem pretty small beer, and quite a long way off now, anyhow. You remember I told you there was a startling difference between the left of our present sector and the right of the one we were in before. It wasn't only the difference between clay and sand, you know. It was that, whereas the right of the old sector was hundreds of yards away from the Boche—as much as six

and seven hundred in parts—the left of the present sector runs down to sixty or seventy yards where it joins Petticoat Lane.

That means a big re-entrant in the line, of course, and a part where our front runs almost at right angles to Fritz's, instead of parallel with it. The new trench would be to bridge the mouth of this re-entrant, and equalise the distance between our line and the Boche's, right along. Apart from anything else, it would make any subsequent push much easier. It's a low-lying, wet, exposed bit, that re-entrant; but this wouldn't matter if we were just going to use it as a jumping-off place, which is what we hope.

However, as there's no official news, one mustn't think too much about it.

It seems there's been some sickness at our Brigade Headquarters, which is a château marked large on the map, though out of sight from the Boche line. The sickness among the orderlies was attributed to something queer about the drains, and I suppose the thing was reported on. Anyhow, as the story I heard to-day goes, a tremendous swell arrived in a car to have a look at the place; an Olympian of the first water, you understand. No doubt I should be executed

by means of something with boiling oil in it if I mentioned his name. As he stepped from his car outside the château two shells landed, one on the lawn and one in the shrubbery. The Olympian sniffed at Fritz's insolence. Before he got into the doorway another shell landed very near his car, and spattered it with mud from bonnet to differential. The august one is reported to have greeted the Brigadier by saying rather angrily:

"This is obviously a most unhealthy spot, sir; most unhealthy. Ought never to have been chosen."

But a better yarn was the one a subaltern of the R.E. told me as I was jogging back to the trenches. This was about the sector next but one north of us. It seems a Boche 'plane was being chased by a British 'plane, and making heavy weather of it. The Englishman had perforated the other fellow's wings very badly, and partly knocked out his engine, too. Anyhow, the Boche 'plane was underdog, and descending rapidly midway between our front line and his own, right over the centre of No Man's Land. Naturally the men in the trenches on both sides were wildly excited about it. The story is they forgot everything else and were simply lining the parapets, yelling

encouragement to their respective airmen as though they had front seats at Brooklands or the Naval and Military Tournament. Seeing this, a pawky old Scot—it was a Highland regiment on our side—slipped quietly down on the fire-step in the midst of the excitement, and began making accurate but leisurely target practice; carefully picking out Boches forty or fifty yards apart from each other, so as not to give the show away too soon. He did pretty well, but was bitterly disappointed when the Boche's Archibald forced our 'plane to rise, just as the Boche airman managed to jigger his machine somehow into his own support lines, and the spectators took cover.

"Och, no a'thegither sae badly, surr," says Scotty to his Platoon Commander. "Ah managed to get nine o' the feckless bodies; but Ah hopet for the roond dizen!"

Rather nice, wasn't it?

Those little shows of ours in Cut-Throat Alley were practically all bombing, you know; but we did rather well in the matter of prisoners taken in the craters, and of Boches otherwise accounted for. Our own casualties for the four days were two killed—both in my Platoon, and both men with wives at home, I grieve to say; thundering good

chaps—and six wounded; two only slightly. We reckon to have got twenty or thirty Boches wounded, and at least ten killed; and there is no sort of reckoning needed about the eleven prisoners we certainly did take in the craters and sent blindfolded down to Headquarters. I believe this beats the record of the Company we relieved, which, of course, knew the place better; and our C.O. is pleased with us. I have to go now and tell off a small carrying party. Though feeling a bit shaky yesterday, I'm as right as right can be again now, so mind, you have no earthly reason to worry about your

"*Temporary Gentleman.*"

P.S.—"The Peacemaker" has just got word from Battalion Headquarters itself that it's perfectly correct about the new front-line trench to be cut; and it is believed "A" Company is to have something to do with it. So that's real news; and we feel sure it means a push to come. Everybody very cock-a-hoop.

THE NEW FRONT LINE

A TURN out, a turn in, and now we're out again, and barring three Field Service post cards, I believe all that time has gone without my writing to you. You must try to forgive me. I can assure you things have been happening. There hasn't been much idle time. When I last wrote we had only begun to talk about the new front trench, hadn't we? Things certainly have hummed since then.

The first move was a tour of inspection and survey of the proposed new line, by the O.C. of our Field Coy. of R.E., with some other officers. Somewhat to my surprise—I suppose he really ought not to expose himself to that extent—our C.O. accompanied this party. The next night, when the pegs were driven in, definitely marking the whole new line, the O.C.R.E. allowed me to go with him. The new line, as we marked it out, was 760 yards long; from down near The Gut right across to what used to be our centre, cutting

off the whole big re-entrant and equalising the whole sector's distance from the Boche.

The next day our C.O. sent for O.C. Companies, and "the Peacemaker" took me along when he went, as I'd been over the ground, and he guessed the pow-wow would be about the new trench. The C.O. told us all about it, and what the ideas of the authorities were. He said it was the sort of job which might possibly prove costly in lives. But it had got to be done, and he was of opinion that if everyone concerned made up his mind never for a moment to relax the care and watchfulness he would use in the first half-hour, the job might be done with comparatively few casualties. He talked longer than he generally does, and I think he felt what he said a good deal. He said he never expected to have one moment's anxiety as to the bearing of any officer, N.C.O., or man of the Battalion in the face of danger. He knew very well we were all right on that score. But what he did want to impress upon us, as officers, was that our duty went a good deal beyond that.

"I know very well that none of you would ever show fear," he said; "and I think you are satisfied that your N.C.O.'s and men will never fail you in that respect. But, remember, your greatest asset

is the confidence the men have in you. Never do anything to endanger that. If you use all the care and judgment you can, and if each one of your men understands exactly what the job before him is, and your influence is such as to prevent anyone from losing his head, no matter what happens, then the casualty list will be low. Every casualty you prevent on a job like this is as good as an enemy casualty gained. When we have to lose our men, let us lose them fighting, as they themselves would choose to go down if go down they must. But in this job of the new trench, we pit our wits and our coolness and discipline and efficiency against those of the Boche; and it's your job to see to it that the work is carried through at the minimum cost in man-power."

He said other things, of course, but that was the gist of it, and I think we were all impressed. He's a martinet all right, is our C.O.; and, as you know, his tongue is a two-edged sword. He's as stern a man as I ever knew; but, by Gad! he's just, and, above and before all else, he is so emphatically a man.

Well, the upshot of our plans was that "A" Company was to provide the covering party and be responsible for the tactical aspect of the show,

and "C" Company—all miners and farm workers —with one Platoon of "D," was to do the digging, for a start, anyhow. The R.E. were to run the wire entanglement right along the front of the new line, and this was to be the first operation. It was obvious that as much as possible must be done during the first night, since, once he had seen the job, as he would directly daylight came, the Boche might be relied on to make that line tolerably uncomfortable for anyone working near it without cover.

While we were out of trenches that week our fellows were pretty busy during the first half of each night carrying material up to the front line. There was a good number of miles of barbed wire to go up, with hundreds of iron screw standards for the wire, and hundreds more of stakes; a lot of material altogether, and I am bound to say I think the R.E. arranged it very well. They had all their material so put together and stowed up at the front as to make for the maximum of convenience and the minimum of delay when they came to handle it in the open and under fire—as men always must be when doing anything in No Man's Land.

Our men were bursting with swank over the

Company's being chosen to act as covering party; delighted to think that what they regarded as the combatant side of the show was theirs. Indeed, I rather think a lot of 'em made up their minds that they were going to utilise the opportunity of having a couple of hundred men out close to the Boche trenches for a real strafe of the men in those trenches. "The Peacemaker" had to get 'em together and talk very seriously and straight about what our responsibilities were in this job. This was necessary to make the beggars realise that ours was a defensive and not an offensive stunt; in which success or failure depended mainly upon our ability to be perfectly silent.

"All the scrapping will come later," said "the Peacemaker." "We mustn't invite one single bullet while we've a couple of hundred men behind us using picks and shovels, and working against time to get cover. If Boches come along our line, it will be our job to strafe 'em with our naked fingers if we possibly can. The last thing we'll do will be to fire a shot. And the one thing that must not happen, not in any case at all—no, not if the whole Prussian Guard turns out—is for a single Boche in any circumstances whatever to get through our line."

And that was the basis on which we tackled the job. Of course, the O.C. knew better than to try to handle his Company as a Company on the night. Orders could only be given in whispers, you understand. As a matter of fact, in all such work, as in night attacks, one must be able to rely, not alone on Platoon Sergeants and senior N.C.O.'s, but on Corporals and Section Commanders. And if they have not been trained so that you can rely on their carrying out instructions exactly, one's chances of success are pretty small.

It was dark soon after five, and by a quarter to six we were moving out into the open. One and two Platoons went out down Stinking Sap, myself in command, and three and four Platoons went out from just a little way above Petticoat Lane. I led my lot and "the Peacemaker" led the other half-Company, the idea being that when he and I met we should know that we were in our right position, and could stay there. We moved with about three paces' interval between men, and kept three or four connecting files out on our inside flank and a couple on the outer flank; the business of the inside men being to steer us at an average distance of forty paces to the front of the foremost line of pegs, which was the line to be followed

by the barbed-wire entanglements; the line of the new trench itself being well inside that again.

This meant that one flank of our line, just above Petticoat Lane, would rest within 150 yards of the Boche front trench, and the other flank about 225 yards. We had drilled the whole business very carefully into the men themselves, as well as the Section Commanders and Sergeants. We got out on our line without a sound; and then "the Peacemaker", made his way back to Stinking Sap to report to Captain ——, of the R.E., that we had taken on the duty of protection and were all ready for his men to go ahead. He marched his carriers out then, stringing them out along the whole line, and the whole of his Company set to work putting up the screen of wire entanglements behind our line.

This whole business has given me a lot of respect for the R.E.; a respect which, I think, is pretty generally felt throughout the Service. The way they planned and carried out that wiring job was fine. No talk and no finicking once they were in the open; every last peg and length of binding wire in its right place; sand-bags at hand to fold over anything that needed hammering; every man told off in advance, not just to make himself

as generally useful as he could, but quite definitely to screw in standards, or drive in stakes, or fix pegs, or carry along the rolls of wire, or strain the stays, or lace in the loose stuff, as the case might be. Every man knew precisely what his particular part was, and went straight at it without a word to or from anyone.

Meanwhile, I was working carefully along from end to end of our line, checking up the intervals, altering a man's position where necessary, and making sure that all our men were properly in touch and keeping their right line, watching out well and making no sound. Nobody in our lot moved, except the officers. All the others lay perfectly still. We kept moving up and down in front the whole time, except when flares were up or machine-gun fire swept across our way, and then, of course, we dropped as flat as we could.

But no machine-gun spoke on that sector, not once while the wire was going up. Before half-past seven "the Peacemaker" came along to me with orders to lead my men off to Stinking Sap. The wiring was finished. There had been a hundred and fifty men at it, and at that moment the last of 'em was entering Stinking Sap—casualties, nil.

"The Peacemaker" marched his half-Company round the end of the wire above Petticoat Lane, and I took mine round the end in front of Stinking Sap-head. Then we wheeled round to the rear of the new wire entanglement and marched out again, immediately in rear of it, till "the Peacemaker" and I met, as we had previously met in front. So we took up our second and final position and got down to it exactly as we had done in the first position.

When the O.C. reported that we were in position, "C" Company marched out, half from each end of the line, under their own officers, but with the O.C.R.E. in command, and his officers helping. They were at three yards' interval. There was a peg for every man, and the first operation was for each man to dig a hole in which he could take cover. It had all been thought out beforehand, and every man knew just what to do. Their instructions were to dig as hard as ever they knew how, but silently, till they got cover. All the sections were working against each other, and the O.C. Company was giving prizes for the first, second, and third sections, in order of priority, to get underground.

We couldn't see them, of course, and had all the

occupation we cared for, thank you, in looking after our line. I was glad to find, too, that we could only hear them when we listened. They were wonderfully quiet. It's a wet clayey soil, and they had been carefully drilled never to let one tool touch another. I am told they went at it like tigers, and that the earth fairly flew from their shovels. In our line there wasn't a sound, and every man's eyes were glued on his front.

The evening had been amazingly quiet, nothing but desultory rifle fire, and unusually little of that. At a quarter to nine a Boche machine-gun dead opposite the centre of my half-Company began to traverse our line—his real objective, of course, being, not our line, but the line of trench, the old fire trench, in our rear. I know now that at that moment the slowest of "C's" diggers was underground. That burst of fire did not get a single man; not a scratch.

A fine rain, very chilling, began to fall, and got less fine as time went on. The wind rose a bit, too, and drove the rain in gusts in our faces. By good luck it was coming from the Boche trenches. At half-past ten they sent over ten or twelve whizz-bangs, all of which landed in rear of our old front line, except two that hit its parapet.

Rifle fire was a little less desultory now, but nothing to write home about. They gave us an occasional belt or two from their machine-guns, but our men were lying flat, and the diggers were below ground, so there was nothing to worry about in that.

By half-past eleven I confess I was feeling deuced tired. One had been creeping up and down the line for over five hours, you know; but it wasn't that. One spends vitality; it somehow oozes out of you on such a job. I never wanted anything in my life so much as I wanted to get my half-Company through that job without casualties. And there was one thing I wanted even more than that—to make absolutely certain that no prowling Boche patrol got through my bit of the line.

Down on our flank at The Gut there were half a dozen little bombing shows between six and midnight, and one bigger scrap, when the Hun exploded a mine and made a good try to occupy its crater, but, as we learned next day, was hammered out of it after some pretty savage hand-to-hand work. Farther away on the other flank the Boche artillery was unusually busy, and, at intervals, sent over bursts of heavy stuff, the opening salvoes of which rather jangled one's nerves. You see, "A"

Company could have been extinguished in a very few minutes had Boche known enough to go about it in the right way.

If only one enterprising Boche, working on his own—a sniper, anybody,—without getting through our line just gets near enough to make out that it is a line, and then gets back to his own trenches, our little game will be up, I thought. It wasn't restful. The men were getting pretty stiff, as you may guess, lying still in the wet hour after hour.

At half-past two "the Peacemaker" came along and whispered to me to take my men in: "Finished for to-night."

I wasn't sorry. I put my senior Sergeant on to lead, and myself brought up the rear. I was, of course, the last to get into Stinking Sap, and my Platoon Sergeant was waiting for me there to tell me that not one of our men had a scratch, nor yet a single man of "C" Company. One man of No. 3 Platoon, in "the Peacemaker's" half-Company, had a bullet through his shoulder; a Blighty, and no more. And that was our record.

But, look here, I absolutely must stop and censor some of the Platoon's letters before turning in. I'll write again as soon as ever I can and tell

you the rest of it. But—a trench nearly 800 yards long, wire entanglements in front—casualties, one man wounded! Nobody felt much happier about it than your

"Temporary Gentleman."

A GREAT NIGHT'S WORK

In my last letter I think I told you all about our first night's work on the new trench; how it was cut, and the wire entanglements run out, between six in the evening and half-past two in the morning; and the casualty list just one man wounded! It may not seem much to you, but to us it seemed almost miraculous. I think the powers that be would have been quite pleased with us if we had managed it with, say, thirty or forty casualties.

Two and a half hours or so later, round about five o'clock, although you would have thought we should all be pretty tired, as no doubt we were (though not so tired, I fancy, as we mostly felt at midnight), everyone was interested in turning out for the morning Stand-to. We were all anxious to watch Mr. Boche's first glimpse of our night's work; not that we could see the expression on the faces of the Germans or hear their comments; but we could imagine a good deal of it, and wanted to see just what happened, anyhow.

A few sentry groups had been posted along the new line when we came in from it at half-past two; but these were withdrawn at the first glimmerings of coming dawn, since we could watch the front as closely from the original fire-trench, and it was possible, of course, that Fritz might just plaster the new line with shrap. and whizzes and so on as soon as he clapped eyes on it.

I was watching before the first greying of the dawn, from a sniper's post pretty close to the Boche line down near the beginning of Petticoat Lane. The first thing I made out in the Boche line, when the light was still only very faint, was the head of a sentry raised well above the parapet level, as he stared out at the nearest bit of our new wire. I turned half round and grabbed a rifle from a man in the trench, but the Boche had disappeared when I looked round again. Then the idea struck me, "Perhaps he'll bring an officer to look; a sergeant, anyhow." So I drew a very careful bead on that spot, and got my rifle comfortably settled on a mud rest.

Sure enough, in a couple of minutes that sentry's head bobbed up again in the same spot. I held my fire, waiting, on the officer theory. And, next moment, another head rose beside the sentry's,

and came up a good deal less cautiously. I won't swear to its being an officer because I couldn't see well enough for that. But I think it very likely was. Anyhow, I had him most perfectly covered when I fired, and they both disappeared the instant I had fired, and never showed up again, so I am certain I got the second one. He was visible down to about his third tunic button, you see, and with a resting rifle, I don't think I could miss at that range. It wasn't more than 120, if that; sights at zero, of course.

It really was rather thrilling, you know, that Stand-to. We had all our machine-guns ready, and traversed Fritz's parapet very thoroughly. Upon my word, in the fluster of that first daylight minute or two, with the new wire under his nose, I believe Fritz thought we were going to make a dawn attack. I never saw so many Boches expose themselves. As a rule, they are a good deal better than we are in the matter of keeping out of sight; they take far fewer chances. But they didn't seem able to help looking this time, and our sniper did pretty well. So did the machine-guns, I think; I don't see how they could have helped it.

Then Boche got his machine-guns to work, and poured thousands of rounds all along our front—a

regular machine-gun bombardment, for which he got precisely nothing at all, none of our people being exposed. But can't you imagine the excitement in the Boche line? The evening before they had seen our line exactly as usual. In the night they had apparently heard and suspected nothing. And now, with the first morning light, they saw a line of brand-new wire entanglement and a new trench line, that must have looked most amazingly close to them, and actually was in parts an advance of 400 yards from the old line. And then the length of it, you know—just on 800 yards. It certainly must have startled 'em.

We quite thought they'd start lambasting Old Harry out of the new line at any moment; but they didn't. I guess they had sense enough to conclude that we had nobody out there. But during the forenoon Master Boche registered on the new line at several points; about twenty rounds of whizzes and H. E., just to encourage us with regard to our work for that night, I suppose. And beyond that he didn't go—dignified silence, you know. But I bet he was pretty mad to think of all he'd missed during the night. In the afternoon Fritz sent a couple of 'planes up, I dare say with cameras, to get a record of the new line.

But our Archibalds in the rear made it so hot for them I don't think they can have got any snapshots.

When "A" Company filed out at six o'clock that night to take up protective duty along the new wire, as before, while the new trench was proceeded with, I think we might have been excused for feeling a bit creepy. I can't say how the men felt, but I confess I had made up my mind that my own chances of getting back were tolerably thin. One must move about a good bit to do one's job properly, and keep touch with a hundred men strung out over 300 yards of ground in pitch darkness. As a matter of fact, it was barely dark when we filed out. We daren't leave it a minute later, in case a strong Boche patrol should have worked inside our line, and been waiting for the working party when it came out with bombs. We simply had to be beforehand with 'em; and there was no getting away from the fact that the Boche had had all day in which to study this new line of ours and make his plans. I say I don't know how our men were feeling. I do know they were cracking little jokes themselves about it before we left the sap.

"This way for motor ambulances!" "Change

here for Blighty and the Rest Cure!" "Where'll you have yours, matey?" I heard plenty of remarks like that as I worked my way down Stinking Sap to get to the head of my lot before we moved out.

"You'll be all right," said one of mine to a "C" Company man as he entered the sap. "Mister blooming Fritz can't get at you with 'A' Company out in front, you take it from me. We'll twist his tail properly if he does come." The "C" men were for digging again, you know.

It's impossible for an officer to feel shaky, however slight his experience, when he has men like ours to work with.

It wasn't exactly a proper trench that "C" Company went to work in that night. There were bits that were almost finished; and then, again, there were other lengths where it was only a chain of holes, linked together by bits a yard or two long, in which the surface had been shifted, just to mark out the trace of the new line. But every man was able to get into cover right away, even in the worst bits, because of these holes, and then, being in a hole, his job was to cut his way along into the next hole just as quick as his strength would allow him. The trench was cut narrow, you

know; not a quarter the width of the old trenches we have occupied. This doesn't make for comfort in getting to and fro; but it does give far safer cover from every kind of projectile, and especially from the deadly shrap. and the slippy whizz.

While "C" slogged away at making connection right through, we lay out by the wire, as we had done the night before, and I crept up and down our line. There was no rain, and the night was so quiet that we could hear every little move among the diggers much more plainly than on the night before. I wondered if the Boches could hear it. They sent us little bursts of machine-gun fire now and again, such as they send throughout every night; and there was the normal amount of rifle fire and the normal number of flares and different kinds of lights going up from the enemy lines. Our men all lay as still as mutton, and when the lights rose near our way, or the M.G. fire came, I naturally kept very still.

Once I distinctly made out a figure moving very slowly and cautiously outside the wire. I should like to have fired, and, better still, to have been able to get quickly and silently through the wire and on to that moving figure, getting to grips, as we did with that German sniper not long since,

without a sound. But there was no opening in the wire near; and with regard to firing, my orders were not to draw fire by expending a single round unnecessarily, and to fire only in defence. What I did was to get the O.C.'s permission shortly afterwards to take three men and patrol beyond the front of the wire. But we found nothing. No doubt I had seen one member of a Boche observation patrol on the prowl to find out what we were doing; and if only I could have got him it would have been excellent. From that time on we kept a continuous patrol going in front of the wire.

Then came a salvo of four whizz-bangs, all landing fairly near the new trench; three in rear of it, and one most infernally close in front of us. I suppose we all told ourselves the ball was just about to begin. But nothing happened for over an hour. Then came nine shells in quick succession, one of which, on my left, robbed my half-Company of four men, one killed and three wounded. The rest accomplished nothing. Then silence again, followed by occasional bursts of M.G. and the usual sort of rifle fire. Corporal Lane, of No. 2 Platoon, stopped a M.G. bullet with his left shoulder, I regret to say, and one

man in the trench—"C" Company—was killed by a bullet through the head.

With every little burst of fire, one braced oneself for the big strafe that we naturally felt must come. It seemed the Boche was playing with us as a cat plays with a mouse. "I wonder what devilry he's got up his sleeve?" We probably all asked ourselves that question fifty times.

At two o'clock there wasn't a break anywhere in the new line. It was a connected trench throughout, and nowhere less than six feet deep, with two communicating trenches leading back to our original front line. At three o'clock the word came along that the working party had been withdrawn, and that I was to take my men in. As before, we left a few sentry groups, to be relieved at dawn by fresh sentries, since the new line was now to be guarded by day and manned by night.

And that was the end of it. I got my men safely in. Half an hour later the Boche sent over another ten or dozen shells on the new line, and once again before dawn he did the same, with the usual periodical bursts of M.G. fire and dropping rifle fire during the rest of the time. And nothing more. Wasn't it extraordinary, when he had had

a whole day to think about it, and must have known we should be at work there that night? Possibly, however, in his crafty way, he assumed we should not go near the new line that second night for fear of strafing, and held his hand for that reason. And, possibly, our General assumed he'd think that, and acted accordingly. But there it is. We got our work done at next to no cost.

I was going to tell you about the rumours as to our push to straighten out the line, but my time's up. That will have to wait for my next letter. We are having an easy time now, but there were no free minutes last week. You'll hear again soon, from your

"*Temporary Gentleman.*"

THE COMING PUSH

You are quite right in saying that I don't feel much interest in political affairs at home these days. The fact is, we do not often see the newspapers, and when we see them there isn't much time for really reading them or giving much consideration to what they say. The war news is interesting, of course; but all this endless talky-talky business, why, I can hardly tell you how queerly it strikes us out here. You see, we are very close to concrete realities all the time, and to us it seems the talky-talky people are most amazingly remote from realities of any kind. They seem to us to be very much interested in shadows, notions, fads, fancies, and considerations of interests which we think were washed out of existence at the very beginning of the war. They even seem able to strive mightily and quarrel virulently over the discussion of the principles and abstractions involved in things they propose to do when the war is over!

M-m-m-m-m-m! Seems to us the thing is to get it over, and in the right way. No, we are not much interested in the political situation. The tangible actualities of the situation out here seem to us very pressing; pressing enough to demand all the energies and all the attention; every atom of the strength of all the people of the British race; without any wastage over more remote things, abstractions, things *ante* and *post bellum.* Here in France I can assure you men, women, and children are all alike in that they have no life outside the war. Every thought, every act, everything is in and for the war. The realities are very close here.

One thing in that last letter of yours especially pleases me. "We have now got to the point in England at which all the people of both sexes who are worth their salt are busy at war work of one kind or another."

That's excellent. Well, now rope in the ones who are not "worth their salt." You'll find they're all right, once they're roped in. I don't believe in this idea of some people not being worth their salt; not in England, anyhow. The stock is too good. You know the type of hoodlum who, with licks of hair plastered over his forehead, seems to

spend his days leaning against a lamp-post. The fellow I mean has a perfectly beastly habit of spitting over everything in sight; when riding on top of a 'bus, for instance. Despised by decent men, he's a real terror to decent women. Same type, I suppose, as the Apache of Paris. Every big city breeds 'em.

Well, all I want to tell you about this gentleman is, never to run away with the notion that he can't be worth his salt. All he needs is to be taught the meaning of authority. It's only a matter of months; even weeks. With my own eyes I have watched the process at work. Nobody will ever again be able to delude me about it. In a country like ours there are no people "not worth their salt." The worst type of man we've got only needs a few months in a Battalion like ours, during the training period, to learn the meaning of authority, and, by means of discipline, to have his latent manhood developed. It's there all right. Only he'll never develop it of his own accord. Authority must be brought to bear. The Army method is the quickest and best. In a few months it makes these fellows men, and thundering good men at that. Worth their salt! They're worth their weight in—well, to take something real and

good, say in 'baccy and cartridges—real men and real fighters.

Out here in billets, we get a deal more information about things generally than ever reaches us in the line. All the rumours come our way, and among 'em, here and there, I dare say, hints of the truth. We know that out there in the new trench we cut no dug-outs are being made. There's no evidence of any intention to inhabit that new front line. It is just fully manned by night and held by a few sentry groups in the day. (It's a deuce of a job getting along it by night when it's full of men. Being kept so narrow, for safety's sake, there are not many places where you can pass men, so you have to get along somehow over their heads or between their legs. Oh, it's great going on a wet night!) And this, in our eyes, is proof positive of the truth of the rumour which says we are to use it almost immediately as a jumping-off place, in a push designed to strengthen and straighten our front line by cutting off that diabolical corner of the Boche line opposite The Gut; to wash out The Gut, in fact, altogether, putting it behind our front line, with all its blood-soaked craters.

I don't think I ought to write much about it,

though I suppose the Censor won't mind so long as I mention no places or names to indicate the part of the front we're on. But, in effect, if we can take several hundred yards of Boche trenches here, the gain to us, apart altogether from strategic considerations, will be equivalent to at least a mile. It's much more than just that, really, because it means getting a very advantageous and commanding position in exchange for a very exposed and deadly one, depriving Boche of a great advantage and gaining a great advantage for ourselves. Even the lesser of the two possible schemes, concerning less than 200 yards of Boche front, would give us all that. But the general opinion seems to be that we are to tackle the larger scheme, involving the seizure of a good mile or more of Boche front. We all think we know, and we none of us know anything, really.

But I must clear out. We have a new issue of improved gas-helmets, and I've got to see to dishing 'em out. Then every man will have two anti-gas helmets and one pair of anti-lachrymatory gas goggles. We are also renewing our emergency, or "iron," ration—and that all looks like a push, and is therefore exhilarating.

Later.

Great and glorious news! The push is a fact. I mustn't say which day, and, just in case this letter fell into wrong hands, I think I'll hold it back, and not post just yet. The main thing is we are to push; and we are jolly well going to wipe out that Boche corner. It is the lesser of the two schemes—a local affair pure and simple, so I suppose you'll learn next to nothing about it from dispatches. You know our British way in the matter of official dispatches. The British have no shop window at all. One ought to be glad of it, I suppose. Ours is the safer, better, more dignified way, no doubt, and certainly never raises hopes doomed to possible disappointment. At the back of my mind I approve it all right. (Which should be comforting to the G.O.C. in C.) But, as touching ourselves, one cannot help wishing the dispatches would give you news of our show. Of course they won't.

"The night was quiet on the remainder of the Front." "Some elements of trenches changed hands in the neighbourhood of ——, the advantage being with us." That's the sort of thing. At least, I hope it'll read that way. It will, if "A" Company can make it so.

I'm particularly glad we had that turn in Petticoat Lane, you know. Now that I think we shall never occupy it again as a front line—by the time you get this, please the pigs, it'll be well behind our front line, and we'll be snugly over the rise where the Boche now shelters—I don't mind admitting to you that it's a heart-breaking bit of line. There's no solid foothold anywhere in it, and there's next to no real cover. It's a vile bit of trench, which we never should have occupied if we'd had any choice in those early days when the Boche first dug himself in opposite, and the French, having no alternative, scratched in here. For our sins we know every inch of it now, and, thanks to good glasses and long hours of study, I think I know the opposite lines pretty well—the lines I hope we shall be in.

Our fellows are queer, you know. Perhaps I've told you. Any kind of suffering and hardship they have to endure they invariably chalk up to the account against Mr. Boche. There's a big black mark against him for our spell in Petticoat Lane, and, by Jupiter! he'll find he'll have to pay for every mortal thing our chaps suffered there; every spoiled or missed meal; even lost boots, sore feet, and all such details. Our chaps make jokes about

these things, and, if they're bad enough, make believe they almost enjoy them while they last. But every bit of it goes down in the account against Fritz; and if "A" Company gets the chance to be after him, by Gad! he'll have to skip! He really will.

I'm not going to risk giving away military information by telling you any more now. It will all be over, and Cut-Throat Alley will be behind us when next I write. And, understand, you are not to worry in the least bit about me, because I promise you I'll get through. I should know if I were not going to; at least, I think I should. But I feel perfectly certain we shall bring this thing off all right anyhow; and so, even if I did chance to go down, you wouldn't grieve about that, would you? because you'd know that's the way any fellow would like to go down, with his Company bringing it off; and, mind you, a thing that's going to make a world of difference to all the hundreds of good chaps who will hold this sector of the front before the war's over.

We've got a mighty lot to wipe out in this little push. It isn't only such scraps of discomfort as we suffered, nor yet the few men we lost there. But, French and British, month in and month out,

for many a long day and night, we've been using up good men and true in that bloody, shell-torn corner. Why, there's not a yard of its churned-up soil that French and English men haven't suffered on. We've all that to wipe out; all that, and a deal more that I can't tell you about. I'll only tell you that I mean to get through it all right. Every man in the Battalion means real business—just as much as any of the chaps who fought under Nelson and Wellington, believe me. So, whatever you do, be under no sort of anxiety about your

"*Temporary Gentleman.*"

P.S.—Seeing that you and I, and all our lot, never have known anything about military matters before this war came, I think it may interest you, as it interests me, to know that I have never seen the Company as a whole jollier, or in higher spirits than it is with this job before it; and, do you know, I never felt happier myself, never. I feel this makes it worth while to be alive and fit; more worth while than it ever was in civil life before the war.

FRONT LINE TO HOSPITAL

PERHAPS this address will be quite a shock to you if you know what it means. So I hasten to say that I am perfectly all right, really. "Clearing Station"—perhaps that won't have the ominous look to you that "Hospital" would, though it means the same thing. But the point is, I am all right. I told you I'd get through, and I have. The fact that I'm lying in bed here—in luxurious comfort—is only an incident. I am quite safe and perfectly all right.

They tell me here that directly an officer is wounded information to that effect is sent home to his people. Well, I hope you will get this word from me first, and accept my assurance that there's nothing to worry about. These good folk here will put me as right as ninepence in no time, and I hope very shortly to be back with the Company and in the new line.

It was shrapnel, you know, and got me in the left leg and a bit in the right arm just when I was

most wanting the use of both of 'em. I hope they haven't told you I'm going to lose my leg or anything, because I'm not. The surgeon here—a first-rate chap and a splendid surgeon—has told me all about it, and my leg will very soon be as good as ever.

This is just a line to let you know I am perfectly all right. I'll write and tell you all about it to-morrow.

I wonder whether the dispatches will have told you anything. The push was splendid. We've got that corner, and The Gut is well behind our front line now.

. . . . . .

My letter of yesterday will have assured you that I am all right; nothing at all to worry about. I meant to have written you fully to-day about the push. But we've been busy. The surgeon's been cleaning me up—getting rid of useless souvenirs, you know; and it seems I'm better keeping pretty still and quiet to-day. Shall be out and about all the quicker, you see. This is a perfectly heavenly place, where you don't hear a vestige of gun-fire, and everything is sweet and clean, quiet and easy; no responsibility, no anything but comfort and

ease. What a luxurious loaf I'm having! I'll write to-morrow.

. . . . . .

I'm going ahead like a house afire; but so confoundedly lazy, you'd hardly believe it. I suppose this pencil will be legible, though it hardly looks it to me. As I say, I'm too lazy for words; simply wallowing in comfort and cleanliness. Thought I would just pencil a line now, so that you would know I was perfectly all right and then I can write properly to-morrow.

. . . . . .

Another lazy day. I really ought to be at work, you know, so well and fit I am. But I just laze in this delightful bed, and watch the busy orderlies and sisters flitting to and fro, as though I were in a dream and other folk had to do all the world's work. The good old "Peacemaker" has come in to see me, and is writing this for me; chiefly because of my laziness, and partly that I like to spare you the work of deciphering the hieroglyphics I make with my left hand. The right arm is pretty good, you know, but it seems I'll get it entirely sound again rather quicker by not using it just now; and

it's rather jolly to have one's O.C. Company working for one in this way.

He says that while I was about it I was a duffer not to get a real Blighty, and so have a holiday and come and see you all. As a fact, I've no doubt he's profoundly grateful that he will not be robbed of my invaluable services for long. "A" Company was relieved last night by a Company of the ——; in our new trenches, you know; the trenches that used to belong to Mister Boche; so our fellows are having a bit of a rest, I'm glad to say. Not the luxurious rest I'm having, of course; but something to be going on with.

I meant to tell you a whole lot of things, but for the laziness that makes me so greedy for naps and dozes. Also, they say visitors have to leave now, and "the Peacemaker" has a good way to ride. I'll write properly to-morrow. Meantime "the Peacemaker" is good enough to say he will write you to-night particulars as to how I got my scratches; so I won't ask him to write any more now. He will carry this on himself when he gets back to-night—while I laze and sleep.

. . . . . .

As promised, I am adding a few lines to this for our good friend. I have not yet told him, but as a fact I am the only unwounded officer in "A" Company at the moment, and we were relieved last night in order that we might reorganise. Lieutenant Morgan—"Taffy"—was killed, I grieve to say, in the beginning of the advance, and our casualties for the Company were thirty-two killed and seventy-eight wounded. It's a terrible price, of course, but you will understand that a big loss was inevitable in our Company, when I tell you that we not only led the advance, but led it from the notorious Petticoat Lane, where the front is extraordinarily difficult to cross. We were very proud to be chosen for the lead, and compared with the net gain for the line, our loss is small, really. Indeed, if the entire casualties in the whole advance are weighed up against the position won, I believe I am right in saying that the cost was remarkably low. The gain in the line is immense, and there is not the smallest chance of the Boches taking it back again. Although our bombardment knocked his trenches about pretty badly—they were very strong trenches indeed, to begin with, very strongly placed and favourably situated—since our occupation we have worked

day and night to make of the corner practically a fortified position, and one from which we can punish the Boché pretty severely on both flanks. I think this gain will lead to other gains before long in this sector. Our information is that the Boche casualties were very heavy. However, I did not mean to run on like this with regard to the military aspect. It is our friend you will want to hear about.

Now, in the first place, I should like to be allowed to say what you perhaps have guessed: that he is a very fine and a very valuable officer. I am not a bad judge, not only because I command his Company, but because, unlike himself, I am not quite without military knowledge of the kind that came before the war, having a good many years behind me of service as a Volunteer, and then as a Territorial, down to within seven months of the beginning of the war when I joined this Service Battalion. And I have no hesitation in saying that our friend is a fine and valuable officer. I know that a big share of any credit due for the fine training and discipline of our Company—which is, I think, admitted to be the crack Company of the best Battalion in the Brigade—is due, not to me, but to the Commander of our No. 1

Platoon. It is a very great loss to me to have him laid aside now; but I am so thankful his life is spared that I have no regret to waste over his being wounded. But I do very sincerely hope that he will be able to return to us, to the reorganised "A" Company, for I have never met an officer I would sooner have beside me. The men of the Platoon, and, indeed, of the whole Company, are devoted to him; and I regard it as little short of marvellous that in so comparatively short a time a man who had never had even the slightest hint of military training should have been able to become, all round, so efficient, so well posted technically, and, above all, so confident and absolutely so successful a leader of men. For that has been his greatest asset: that his men will go anywhere with him, do anything for him, trust him without the slightest reserve or doubt.

You know more about his character than I do, but I venture to say that the character you know has been wonderfully developed by the war and by his military training. He may have been the most lovable of men before, but I cannot believe that he was anything like so strong a man or so able a man. Confidence, fearlessness, decisiveness —strength, in fact; these qualities, I am sure,

have developed greatly in him since he joined. I sometimes think there is nothing more wonderful in all this wonderful period of the war than the amazing development it has brought in the thousands of young Englishmen who now are capable and efficient officers, loved and trusted by their men, and as able in every way as any officers the British Army ever had, although the great majority of them have no military tradition behind them, and before August, 1914, had no military training. That is wonderful, and I am convinced that no other race or nation in the wide world could have produced the same thing. The men, fine as they are, might have been produced elsewhere, or something like them. But this apparently inexhaustible supply of fine and efficient officers—no, I think not.

The newspapers will have told you something of our little push, and I will not trouble you with any technical detail. We advanced over a very narrow front after a short but intense bombardment. Our friend led the right half of "A" because I did not want to rob his own Platoon of his immediate influence. His is No. 1. The pace was hot, despite the torn and treacherous nature of the ground. The right half did even better than

my half, and stormed the first Boche line with extraordinary dash and vigour. It seemed as though nothing could stop their impetuosity; and in the midst of the tremendous din I caught little waves of their shouting more than once.

Our friend had crossed the first line, and successfully led his men to the very edge of the second line, shouting to his men to join him in taking it, when the shell burst that brought him down. The same shell must have laid some Boches low, if that is any consolation. Not that we need any consolation. I feel sure you will agree with me in that.

But I want to tell you that the wounds in the right arm—not serious, I am thankful to say—were not from the same shell. They came in the neighbourhood of the first Boche line. That same right arm (after it was wounded), carrying a loaded stick, knocked up a Boche bayonet that was due to reach the chest of a man in No. 1 Platoon and then served to support the same man on the parapet of the Boche trench—he was already wounded—for a few moments till a stretcher-bearer got him. It was not possible for our friend to stay with him, of course. A few seconds later he was leading his men full pelt

towards the second line; and all that after his first wound. I thought you would like to know that. Our C.O. knows it, and I venture to hope it will find mention in dispatches.

And now with regard to his condition. Whilst he is not quite so forward as he thinks—there is, of course, no question of his coming back to duty in a few days, as he fancies—there is, I think, no cause whatever for anxiety. In fact, the M.O. at the Clearing Station assured me of so much. His general health is excellent; nothing septic has intervened; it is simply a question of a little time. The worst that is likely to happen is that the left leg may be permanently a shade shorter than the right, and it is hoped this may be averted. His Company—all that is left of us—will be very sincerely glad to see him back again. Meantime we rejoice, as I am sure you will, in the manner, the distinction, of his fall, in the certainty of his enjoying the rest he has earned so well, and in the prospect of his recovery.

THE PUSH AND AFTER

THE Battalion being now out of the line, the O.C. Company has kindly sent my batman along to me here—you remember my batman, Lawson, on Salisbury Plain—and he is writing this for me, so that I can preserve my present perfect laziness. I point this out by way of accounting for the superior neatness of the handwriting, after my illegible scrawls. Lawson was a clerk at ——'s works before the war, and, as you perceive, has a top-hole "hand of write."

I got rather a fright, as I lay dreaming here, half awake and half asleep, at six o'clock this morning. An orderly came along with a blue ticket and a big safety-pin, like those the Highlanders use in their petticoats, and pinned his label on the bottom of my counterpane.

"Hallo!" says I; "what's this? Are they putting me up for sale?"

Mentally, I began to describe myself for the catalogue. (How strong are the habits of civil

life!) "One full-size, extra heavy Temporary Officer and Gentleman; right arm and left leg slightly chipped, the whole a little shop-worn, but otherwise as new. Will be sold absolutely without reserve to make room for new stock." (They have to keep as many beds as possible vacant in Clearing Stations, you know.)

The orderly just grinned and faded away like the Cheshire cat. A Sister came along shortly afterwards, and I asked her the meaning of my blue label.

"Oh! that," she said, very casually, "that's the evacuation card."

I am to be evacuated, like a pulverised trench, a redoubt that has become useless or untenable. Jolly, isn't it? Seriously, I was a good deal worried about this, until I had seen the M. O., because I had an idea that once one was evacuated out of the Divisional area, one was automatically struck off the strength of one's unit, in which case, goodness knows when, if ever, I should see my own "A" Company again. But the M.O. tells me it's all right, so long as one remains in France. One is only struck off on leaving France, and when that happens one can never be sure which Battalion of the Regiment one will return to. So there's

nothing to worry about. It's only that these Clearing Stations have to keep plenty of vacant accommodation ready for cases fresh out of the line; and so fellows like me, who are supposed to require a bit more patching up than can be given in two or three days, have to be evacuated to one or other of the base hospitals. Hence the label, which makes of your Temporary Gentleman an "evacuation case."

It's uncertain when I shall be moved, or to which base, so I cannot give you a new address for letters. The generosity, the kindness, the skill, and the unwearying attentiveness and consideration shown one in this place could not possibly be improved on; but their official reticence in the matter of giving one any information regarding one's insignificant self, future movements, and so on, can only be described as godlike. I shall always associate it in my mind with a smile of ineffable benevolence (also rather godlike), as who should say, with inexhaustible patience, "There, there, my little man; there, there." And that's all. Perhaps it's good for us, taken, as medicine must be, with childlike trust and faith. We must hope so.

Come to think of it, there is a hint in the gentle air of this place—never torn by shot or shell, or

penetrated by even the faintest odour of defunct Boches in No Man's Land—of a general conspiracy of reticence. It has infected mine own hitherto trusted batman (who presumes to chuckle as he writes these lines at my dictation), whose professed ignorance, regarding most points upon which I have this morning sought information, suggests that I have in the past consistently overrated his intelligence and general competence. It is clearly very desirable that I should get back to my Platoon as soon as possible.

Lying here at mine ease, I think a great deal; but of the quality of my thinking I fear there is little to be said that is favourable. Perhaps the medicine I take so trustfully has contained some of the soporific stuff of dreams, and that is why the pain in my leg has been so trifling since the first day here. I feel my thoughts stirring in my mind; but they move in a swaying, dreamy fashion, as though they were floating in, say golden syrup, and were not really interested in getting out of it. I wanted to tell you all about our push, but, do you know, though it was not very many days ago, it seems already extraordinarily remote, so far as the details are concerned, and I am hazy as to what I have told you and what I have not told.

One thing stands out so clearly in my otherwise treacly mind that I feel I never, never shall forget it; and that is the sensation of the moment when the order reached us to advance. We had been a long time waiting for it, even before our bombardment began, and when it came— But, although the sensation is very clear to me, I'm not at all sure I can convey any idea of it to you. I've just asked Lawson what he felt like when it came; but the conspiracy of reticence, or something, leads him to say he doesn't know. I found myself muttering something at the moment, and he says he did, too. That's something of a coincidence. He believes the actual words he muttered were: "What ho!" But that's not exactly illuminating, is it?

I believe my thought, as we scrambled over the parapet was that now, at last, we were going to wipe Petticoat Lane off the map as a front line. Good-bye to this hole! That was the idea, I think. We did so hate that bit of line, with its quicksand craters in front, and the sodden lowness that made it a sort of pocket for the receipt of every kind of explosive the Boche liked to lob in on us.

The struggle through the craters, before we got

to the first Boche line, was pretty beastly, and, I am afraid, cost us rather dear, although we got to the near lip of the craters before the punishment began, thanks to a quick start and the fine accuracy of our gunners in their curtain fire. You know the sort of thing that happens in nightmares, when each of your feet weighs a ton and a half, at the moment when speed is the only thing to save you from the most hideous kind of spiflication. Getting through the craters was like that.

Our good time began when the craters were passed, and there was nothing but Boche trenches in front of us. Then it was we began to feel the jolly feelings you've read about; the glorious exhilaration of the charge. And, really, it wouldn't be possible to exaggerate about that. You can take it from me that the most highly coloured chromo-lithographs can't overdo that, in the essential spirit of the thing. Their detail is pretty groggy, of course—no waving plumes, gay colours, flashing swords, and polished top-boots, you know. My goodness, no! We were all the colour of the foul clay we'd come from—all over. But the spirit of it! It's perfectly hopeless for me to try to tell you, especially in a letter. They say they pump spirits and drugs into the

Boches before they leave their trenches. No drug and no champagne, even of the choicest, could have given us any more exhilaration, I fancy, than one felt in that dash from the craters to the first Boche line. Heavens! but it was the real thing; real, real, real; that's what it was, more than anything else. Made you feel you'd never been really and fully alive till then. Seven-leagued boots, and all that kind of thing, you know. The earth seemed to fly under your feet. I can see the dirty, earth-smeared faces in that Boche trench now. (They were scuffling and scrambling out from the dug-outs, where they'd sheltered from our bombardment, to their fire-steps.) They seemed of no more importance than so many Aunt Sallies or Dutch dolls. Things like that to stop *us!* Absurd!

And how one whooped! I was fairly screaming "'A' Company!" at the very top of my voice as we jumped into that trench. The man on my left was Corporal Slade (Lance-Sergeant, I should say) and, as we reached their parapet I could hear him yelling beside my ear, through all the roar of the guns: "Hell! Give 'em hell! Give 'em hell, boys!" Most outrageous!

In the trench it was a sort of a football scrum glorified; oh! very much glorified. Most curiously,

the thing passing through my mind then was "the Peacemaker's" old gag, apropos of the use of his trench dagger, you know: "When you hear that cough, you can pass on to the next Boche. Get him in the right place, and three inches of the steel will do. Don't waste time over any more." Queer wasn't it?

Galloping across the next stretch—by the way, it was the very devil getting out over the Boche parados, so high and shaly. A fellow grabbed my right ankle when I was half-way up; the very thing I'd always dreaded in dreams of the trenches, and, by Gad! if I didn't kick out you must let me know about it. I'd sooner have had a bayonet thrust any day than the ram of my field boot that chap got in his face. The next stretch, to the Boche second line, yes! The champagney feeling was stronger than ever then, because one felt that front line was smashed. Sort of crossing the Rhine, you know. One was on German soil, so to say. My hat, what scores to pay!

And mixed up with the splendid feeling of the charge itself—by long odds the finest feel I ever had in my life—there was a queer, worrying little thought, too. I knew some of our men were dropping, and— "Damn it, I ought to be

doing something to save those chaps." That was the thought. It kind of stung; sort of feeling I ought to have some knowledge I had failed to acquire. They're your men, you ought to know. That sort of feeling. But I don't think it slowed one's stride at all. The champagne feeling was the main thing. I was absolutely certain we were bringing it off all right. The Boche guns were real enough; but their men didn't seem to me to count.

Queer thing about the wire in front of that second line. It wasn't anything like so good or extensive as front-line wire, and I dare say our guns had knocked a good deal of the stuffing out of it. Still, there was a lot left, more than I expected for a second line. Do you know, "A" Company went through it as though it had been paper. It was a glorious thing that. You know how gingerly one approaches barbed wire or anything like that; a thorn hedge, if you like. And you've seen how fellows going into the sea to bathe, at low tide, will gallop through the rows of little wavelets where the water's shallow; feet going high and arms waving, the men themselves whooping for the fun of the thing. That's exactly how our chaps went through that wire. I'll

guarantee nobody felt a scratch from it. And yet my breeches and tunic were in ribbons from the waist down when I got to the field ambulance, and from the waist to the knee I'll carry the pattern of that wire for some time to come. Might have been swan's-down for all we knew about it.

And then, unfortunately, on the parapet of the second line I got my little dose, and was laid out. Goodness knows, that shell certainly laid out some Boches as well as me. I'll say this for 'em, they met us on the parapet all right. But "A" Company's business was urgent. We had scores to settle from Petticoat Lane and other choice spots; and the Kaiser's got no one who could stop us. I do wish I could have seen it through. I know they tried hard to counter us out of that line. But they couldn't shift old "A," who did just as well when I dropped out as before—the beggars! Lawson tells me I was yelling like a madman on that parapet for some time before I went to sleep, you know: "I'll be there in a minute!"—there in a minute! How absurd!

Next thing I knew I was being lifted out of a trench stretcher, right away back at Battalion Headquarters in the old support line. Then the good old Batt'n M.O. prodded around me for a

bit, and gave me a cigarette, I remember. I remember hearing him say: "Oh! well, *you're* all right." And then I must have had another doze.

Next thing I remember I was lying in a right-hand lower stretcher in a motor ambulance, and soon after that I was in bed in the Field Ambulance at ——. The same night I came on here, the Field Ambulance being pretty busy and full up. It's only a few miles off. I know there was snow all round when I was being lifted out of the motor ambulance into the hall here.

And then comfort, and cleanliness and quiet; most wonderful peace, and English nursing sisters. My goodness, aren't English nursing sisters lovely? English women, all of 'em, for that matter. And they say there are still some men at home who don't want to join! Seems queer to me.

Well, Lawson is rapidly developing writer's cramp, and I don't wonder at it.

And so I'm to move on somewhere else soon from here. In any case, you understand, don't you, that I'm all right, wanting for nothing, and most kindly looked after. I'll write again very soon, and whatever you do, don't have the smallest feeling of anxiety about your

"*Temporary Gentleman.*"

BLIGHTY

THIS is to be evacuation day. A dozen officers and nearly a hundred other ranks are to leave this place to-day for one or other of the bases. The life of a permanent official in one of these Clearing Stations must be curious, handling as he does a never-ending stream of the flotsam and jetsam of the great war. The war knocks chips off us, and as we are broken we stream in through the hospitable portals of this beautifully organised and managed place; are put in plaster of Paris, so to say, and off we go again to another place to be further doctored; the more newly chipped arriving by one gate, as we go trickling out by another. And this process is continuous. Along the British front alone a score or more of men are bowled over every hour. In a place like this the process is brought home to one.

So, too, is the ordered precision and efficacy of the system of dealing with the wreckage. It is wonderfully methodical and well thought out.

And over all, as I told you before, broods the spirit of benevolent reticence, which makes one feel a little like a registered parcel entrusted to a particularly efficient postal service. "When are we going?" Benevolent smile. "Presently; presently." "What base are we going to?" Benevolent smile. "You'll see by and by." "About how long shall we be on the journey?" Benevolent smile. "Oh! you'll be made quite comfortable on the journey. Don't worry about that." "Well, I'm very much better this morning, don't you think?" Benevolent smile. "Do you think I shall be able to sit up in a day or two?" Benevolent smile. "We shall see."

So it is always. I dare say the thirst of patients for information often becomes very trying to the authorities. But they never in any circumstances show any impatience. They never omit the benevolent smile. And they never, never, for one instant, relax the policy of benevolent reticence; never. The man next to me is very keen about his temperature; it is, I believe, the chief symptom of his particular trouble. But the bland familiar smile is all the reply he can ever get to his most crafty efforts to ascertain if it is higher or lower. I haven't the slightest doubt it is all part of a

carefully devised policy making for our benefit; but I wouldn't mind betting the man in the next bed sends his temperature up by means of his quite fruitless efforts to ascertain that it has gone down.

Later.

Here's another strange handwriting for you. The present writer is Lieut. R——, whose left arm has had a lot more shrap. through it than my right got, and who has kindly lent me the services of his right. My left-handed writing is still, as you will have noted, a bit too suggestive of a cryptogram in Chinese. We are lying opposite one another in very comfortable bunks in the Red Cross train, making from —— to a base, we don't yet know which. There are nearly 500 "evacuation cases" on board this train. Its progress is leisurely, but I believe we are to reach our destination round about breakfast time to-morrow. We found books and magazines in the train when we came on board. That's a kindly thought, isn't it? They bear the stamp of the Camps Library. The doctors and nurses get round among us on the train just as freely as in hospital. The whole thing is a triumph of good management.

While we were lying in our stretchers waiting for the train, having arrived at the station in motor ambulances from the Clearing Station, we saw miles of trains pass laden with every conceivable sort of thing for the French firing line; from troops to tin-tacks; a sort of departmental store on wheels; an unending cinematograph film, which took over an hour to roll past us, and showed no sign of ending then. All the French troops, with their cigarettes and their chocolate, had kindly, jovial greetings for the stretchered rows of our chaps as we lay in our blankets on the platform waiting for our train, especially the jolly, rollicking Zouaves. Good luck, and a pleasant rest; quick recovery, and —as I understand it—return to the making of glory, they wished us, and all with an obviously comradely sincerity and play of facial expression, hands and shoulders, which made nothing of difference of language. And our chaps, much more clumsily, but with equal goodwill, did their level best to respond. I think the spirit of their replies was understood. Yes, I feel sure of that. The war's a devastating business, no doubt; but it has introduced a spirit of comradeship between French and English such as peace could never give.

Next morning.

You will forgive the left-handedness of the writing, won't you? My friend opposite has had a good deal of pain during the night, and I cannot ask him to write for me now. It was a strange night, and I don't think I'll ever forget it, though there's really nothing to tell; "Nothing to write home about," as the men say. I didn't sleep much, but I had quite a comfortable night, all the same, and plenty to think about. When the train lay still between stations, as it sometimes did, I could hear snatches of talk from different parts of the train itself—doctors, nurses, orderlies, patients, railway officials, and so on. Then perhaps another train would rumble along and halt near us, and there would be talk between people of the two trains: French, English, and the queer jumble of a patois that the coming together of the twain in war has evolved. Also, there was the English which remains English, its speaker not having a word of any other tongue, but which yet, on the face of it, somehow, tells one it is addressed to someone who must understand it from its tone or not at all.

"Oh, that's it, is it? Cigarettes? You bet. Here, catch, old chap! Bong, très bong Woodbine.

What ho! Same to you, old chap, an' many of 'em. Yes, yes; we'll soon be back again, an' then we'll give the blighters what for, eh? Chocolate, eh? Oh, mercy, mercy! No, no; no more; we got plenty grub; much pang, savvy. You're a brick, you are. You bong, très bong; compree? Hallo! Off again! Well, so long, old sport! Good luck! Bong charnce! See ye 'gain some time! Bong sworr!"

There's a poor chap in the bunk under mine who's been delirious most of the night. He looks such a child. A second lieutenant of the ——s; badly shaken up in a mine explosion, and bombed afterwards. The M.O. says he'll get through all right. He's for Blighty, no doubt. Odd, isn't it? This time to-morrow he may be in England, or mighty near it. England—what an extraordinary long way off it seems to me. There have been some happenings in my life since I was in England; and as for the chap I was before the war, upon my word, I can hardly remember the fellow. Pretty sloppy, wasn't he? Seems to me I must have been a good deal of a slacker; hadn't had much to do with real things then.

We know at last where we're bound for; in fact, we're there. The train has been backing and

filling through the streets of the outskirts of Havre for the last half-hour or more. But last evening, when I was writing, we could only ascertain that we were going to ——. Benevolent smiles, you know.

It's frightfully interesting to see the streets. I see them through the little narrow flap at the top of my window that's meant to open. It seems quite odd to see women walking to and fro; and row after row of roofs and windows, all unbroken. No signs of shell-shock here. But on the other side of the train, nearest the harbour, one sees acres and acres of war material; I mean really acres and acres of rations, barbed wire, stores of all kinds.

There's a sort of bustle going on in the train. I think we must be near the end, so I'll put my note-book away.

10.45 A.M.

We are in what they call the Officers' Huts, on some quay or another. It's a miniature hospital or clearing station, built of wood, and very nicely fitted up. Sitting-room at one end, then beds, and then baths and cooking-place and offices; all bright and shining and beautifully clean, with

Red Cross nurses, doctors, orderlies, and no end of benevolent smiles. They've taken our temperatures and fixed us up very comfortably, and somebody's started a gramophone, and I've just had a cup of the glutinous, milky stuff I used to hate, you remember. I don't hate such things nowadays; not really, you know; but I pretend I don't care much about 'em for the sake of the virtuous glow it gives to take 'em.

Everyone has asked everyone else where we are going next, and everyone has been given benevolent smiles and subsided into a Camps Library magazine or book. The sitting-up cases are pottering about in the sitting-room, where there are basket chairs and the gramophone. I can see them through the open door. The nurses have fixed jolly little curtains and things about, so that the place looks very homely. I gather it's a sort of rest-house, or waiting-place, where cases can be put, and stay put, till arrangements have been made for their admission into the big hospitals, or wherever they are to go. We have all been separately examined by the Medical Officer. My arm is so much better, I think it must be practically well. I don't know about the leg. I asked the M.O.—an awfully decent chap—to try

to arrange things for me so that I should not be cut adrift from my own Battalion, and he said he thought that would be all right.

3.30 P.M.

I'm for Blighty. The M.O. came and sat on my bed just now and told me. He certainly is a decent chap. He said the Medical Board had no hesitation at all about my case, and that I was to cross to England to-night. But he said I need not worry about my Battalion. He was awfully good about it; and he's giving me a letter to a brother of his in London. He thinks I shall be able to get back to my own Battalion all right, and he thinks I shall be ready for duty much quicker by going right through to Blighty than by waiting here. But what do you think of it? Fancy going to Blighty; and to-night, mind you! I'd never dreamt of it. And what about poor old "A" Company? It's a queer feeling. We've all been sorted out now; the goats from the sheep. I suppose it's a case of the worst-chipped crockery for Blighty, and the rest for tinkering here. But I can't help thinking a week, or two, at the outside, will put me right. . . . Here come Army Forms to be signed.

9.30 P.M.

In bed on board the Red Cross ship. All spotless white enamel and electric light, and spotlessly-aproned nurses, just as in hospital. I've just been dressed for the night; clean bandages and everything comfortable. From the last benevolent smile I elicited I shouldn't be surprised if we weighed anchor round about midnight; but I may be quite wrong. Anyhow, I feel remarkably comfortable. I think there must have been something specially comforting in the medicine I had when my bandages were changed. I shall sleep like a top. I don't think I've quite got the hang yet of the fact that I am actually bound for Blighty. But there it is; I'm on the ship, and I suppose it's on the cards I may see you before this scribble of mine can reach you by post. In which case, it seems rather waste of time writing at all, doesn't it? I think I'll go to sleep. I haven't slept since the night before last. That boy I told you of who was bombed, after being in a mine explosion, is sleeping like an infant in the next cot but one to mine. Nice-looking chap. I'm glad he's sleeping; and I bet somebody will be glad to see him in Blighty to-morrow. To-morrow! Just fancy that!

Next day.

To-day's the day. When I woke this morning I had glimpses, as the ship rose and fell, of a green shore showing through the portholes on the far side of the deck. That was the Isle of Wight. Had a magnificent sleep all night; only opened my eyes two or three times. We were rather a long time getting in. Then came Medical Officers of the Home Service; and with surprisingly few benevolent smiles—not that they lack benevolence, at all—I learned that I was for London. It hardly seemed worth while to write any more, and I could not get off the ship to send a wire.

Now I am in a Red Cross division of an express train bound for Waterloo. I'll send you a wire from there when I know what hospital I am for. Shan't know that till we reach Waterloo. Meantime—that's Winchester we've just passed. Old England looks just the same. There is a little snow lying on the high ground round Winchester. It looks the same—yes, in a way; and in another way it never will look just the same again to me. Never just the same, I think. It will always mean a jolly lot more to me than it ever did before. Perhaps I'll be able to tell you about that when

we meet. I find I can't write it. Queer thing, isn't it, that just seeing these fields from the windows of a train should bring the water to one's eyes? Very queer! One kind of sees it all through a picture of the trenches, you know.

"The Old Peacemaker" didn't tell me, but I know now that nearly half "A" Company are casualties; and there's a good many "gone West." Poor Taffy's gone. Such a clever lad, Taffy. My Platoon won't be quite the same again, will it? Platoon Sergeant, one other Sergeant, two Corporals, and a lot of men gone. We were in front, you see. Oh! I know there's nothing to grieve about, really. Petticoat Lane's behind our front now, thank goodness. That'll save many a good man from "going West" between now and the end of the war.

I'm not grieving, but it makes a difference, just as England is different. Everything must be different now. It can't be the same again, ever, after one's been in the trenches. If Germany wants to boast, she can boast that she's altered the world for us. She certainly has. It can never be the same again. But I think it will be found, by and by, she has altered it in a way she never

meant. Of course, I don't know anything much about it; just the little bit in one's own Brigade, you know. But it does seem to me, from the little I've seen, that where Germany meant to break us, she has made us infinitely stronger than we were before. Look at our fellows! Each one is three times the man he was before the war. The words "fighting for England" had next to no meaning for me before August, 1914. But now! that's why these fields look different, why England can never again look the same to me as it did before. I know now that this England is part of me, or I'm part of it. I know the meaning of England, and I swear I never did before. Why, you know, the very earth of it—well, when I think how the Boche has torn and ravaged all before him over there, and then think of our England, of what the Hun would do here, if he got half a chance. . . . It's as though England were one's mother, and some swine were to——

But it's no good. I can't write about it. I'll try to tell you. But, do you know, it wasn't till I saw these fields that the notion came over me that I'm sort of proud and glad to have these blessed wounds; glad to have been knocked

about a bit. I wonder whether you and Mother will be glad, too; I somehow think you will—for your

"*Temporary Gentleman.*"

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